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## THE SEARCH FOR THE INDIVIDUAL:

1750-1850

*Russel B. Nye*

*The Centennial Review Lectureship was established in 1959 to honor that member of the Michigan State University faculty who in the opinion of the Board of Directors and of the Editorial Board best exemplifies the ideals of scholarship and style of THE CENTENNIAL REVIEW and of the disciplines represented by the Editorial Board. The Lecture is delivered at a University Convocation open to the public, and the lecturer receives a monetary award; in addition, the Lecture is published in THE CENTENNIAL REVIEW.*

*It is altogether fitting that the first Centennial Review Lectureship should have been awarded to Dr. Russel B. Nye, Professor of English and Director of the Division of Language and Literature of the College of Science and Arts. Born in 1913, Dr. Nye received his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin and came to Michigan State University in 1940. He is the author of GEORGE BANCROFT: BRAHMIN REBEL, FETTERED FREEDOM, MIDWESTERN PROGRESSIVE POLITICS, the Penguin HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, A BAKER'S DOZEN: AMERICAN PORTRAITS, WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, and THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL CULTURE: 1776-1830. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his biography of George Bancroft, and he has held Rockefeller Foundation, Newberry Library, and Knopf fellowships. He has lectured at the Institut d'Études Juridiques at the Université d'Aix-Marseilles and the Centre Universitaire Méditerranéen.*

*It is a source of great satisfaction to me to have helped in the establishment of the Centennial Review Lectureship, and it is a particular pleasure for me to publish the paper of a distinguished scholar who has been my colleague and friend for 18 years and will be, I hope, for at least as many more to come.—Editor*

THIS ESSAY IS CONCERNED with an exploration of certain aspects of American intellectual life during the period 1750 to 1850. Its thesis is not complicated. Stated simply, it is that because of certain major changes in what men believed about human nature and truth, there were corresponding changes, between 1750 and 1850 in the United States, in American

concepts of individualism and progress—and that the social, political, religious, and cultural thought of this period reflects these changes. To phrase it differently, life in the United States from the middle of the 18th century to the Civil War can be most clearly read in terms of a pervasive popular faith in the individual's adequacy to fulfill all his aims and functions. The framework of American thought in the United States during these years was constructed about this principle.

This belief in individualism and progress, one must hasten to point out, is congruent with the American acceptance of the Romantic movement. But it must be noted first that the United States emphasized certain aspects of Romanticism in a manner, and to a degree, not true of contemporary England or Europe. And second, by reason of its historical and intellectual environment, American thought in the decades after 1750 would naturally have centered about these twin principles of individualism and progress, even had no Romantic movement existed to reinforce them.

These two related doctrines of perfectibility and progress, which provided the foundation for American thought from 1750 to 1850, were part of the great ideological legacy bequeathed to America from the 17th- and 18th-century philosophers. What the 19th century believed to be true about the nature of man, of course, was not the same as the 18th century's heritage, which, like all such legacies, underwent a sea-change. A great deal happened after 1750—in philosophy, politics, society, and in the quality of life itself after the Revolution—to make the generation of Emerson and Jackson much more assured and enthusiastic about mankind's present and future than the age of Franklin and Jonathan Edwards could afford to be. It happened in this way.

## I

First, the American belief in the perfectibility of mankind rested on a powerful faith in the intrinsic goodness of human nature. Many Americans of the late 18th century—among them Paine, Barlow, Jefferson, Rush, and Franklin in his more sanguine moments—conceived their fellowmen to be

perfectly capable of infinite progress and unlimited knowledge, because they believed that mankind was essentially trustworthy. Americans of their generation, in fact, tended to hold far fewer reservations about the reliability of ordinary man than did the Europeans or British. This was the result, perhaps, of a long frontier heritage, a successful revolution, and a new, incomplete, open society of opportunity. Whatever the reason, American thinkers of the later 18th century were much more confident of man's virtue and rationality than the majority of contemporary British philosophers—much closer, in their faith, to the French. What the British Romantics considered a *qualified* trust in humanity's *ultimate* goodness, the Americans (and the French *philosophes*) took as absolute conviction.

There was no reason, many Americans believed, why the heavenly city of the 18th-century philosophers could not be built by good men on this earth, on this side of the Atlantic, here and now. "No definite limits," Thomas Jefferson wrote, "can be assigned to . . . the improveability of the human race." Dr. Benjamin Rush, throwing caution aside, was "fully persuaded that it is possible to produce such change in the moral character of man, as shall raise him to a resemblance of angels—nay more to the likeness of God himself." When Joel Barlow asked rhetorically in *The Columbiad* (1809), "Where shall we limit the progress of human wisdom, and the force of its institutions?" he implied his own answer.

Out of this confidence in humanity, the political theorists of the new republic contrived a government built about the individual's "natural" rights, his inherent wisdom, and his ability to rule himself. There were those, of course, such as Timothy Dwight of New England, or John Adams, or Alexander Hamilton, or Fisher Ames, who did not fully share the easy confidence of the times; even the usually optimistic Franklin, now and then, had uneasy glimpses of men as "a set of Beings badly constructed." Nevertheless, there were more believers than doubters in the young United States. They agreed with Pope that the "proper study of mankind" was man, but not Pope's 18th-century man.

It was the individual, free-standing man in whom they believed, not man the pebble in Pope's social aggregate, and it was also *American* man. This confidence lent excitement to the times. Philip Freneau, the poet, writing in 1771 of *The Rising Glory of America*, impatiently awaited the day when in America

A new Jerusalem, sent down from Heaven,  
Shall grace our happy earth,

while "the future situation of America" filled Joel Barlow's mind with "a peculiar dignity" and opened "an unlimited field of thought."

The change which took place in American thought after 1750 in the attitude toward the individual was the result, among other things, of certain new decisions reached by philosophers and theologians about the availability of truth. The 18th century was convinced that man, by exercise of his reason, could locate truth and act upon it. To that century, however, the apprehension of truth was to a great degree a social process, for social ends. As individuals seized upon fragments of truth, society put them together in coherent order to provide patterns and standards for life and belief. The early 18th century, quite certain of this, placed its reliance on Reason as the prime quality of mind by which the truth was found. Later 18th-century thinkers, though still confident of man's rationality, began to have doubts.

At the same time, the generation of Americans who were busy justifying a revolution and building a government on "self-evident" principles, found some difficulty in substantiating those so-called "self-evident truths." What the revolutionary philosophers should have been able to prove "true" by reason, they could not; how could one "prove" the right to the pursuit of happiness, when there was still some legal question about his right to liberty? Since they were forced by necessity to accept and act upon *unproveable* truths—self-evident truths—American thinkers revised their opinions of how one located truth, and the qualifications for its discovery.

This "self-evident truth" posed a bothersome problem to

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the thinkers of the post-Revolutionary years. If a truth were self-evident, how could it be verified? Could it be also self-originated, perhaps not a product of the reason or subject to it? It is interesting to see the Age of Reason proving the unproveable. John Harris, when he included the term "self-evident axiom" in his *Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, defined it as "a generally-received principle or rule in any art or science." Not satisfied, he retreated a step and tried again; such an axiom could not be demonstrated "because 'tis itself much better known than anything that can be brought to prove it." Joel Barlow, the American poet-soldier-diplomat-philosopher who had a facility for phrasing intellectual issues, wrestled with the same problem. He finally concluded that there were three kinds of truth—*rational* truth (capable of proof by logic within the mind), *scientific* (capable of empirical demonstration), and *self-evident*, which Barlow defined as those truths "as perceptible when first presented to the mind as our age or world of experience could make them."

James Wilson, the brilliant Pennsylvania jurist, grappled with the problem, too, concluding, like Barlow, that there were three kinds of verifiable truth. First, Wilson accepted those "truths given in evidence by the external senses," which provided knowledge of the physical world. Second, he said, were truths "given in evidence by our moral faculty," which supplied men with moral and ethical knowledge. And third, he recognized a puzzling kind of truth "which we are *required* and determined by the constitution of our nature and faculties to believe." But neither Barlow nor Wilson, nor others who struggled with the problem, could quite define this unproveable truth; they simply knew such truths existed, and that men somehow possessed the power to find them. So while the 18th century read Locke and dutifully tested its ideas by reason and experiment, it was also aware that there were more things than one dreamed of beyond the empirical philosophy.

By degrees, then, the "self-evident truth" turned into a kind of knowledge which no one needed to justify. The intuitive and unproveable, in the opening years of the 19th

century, became as valid to the philosopher as the rational. And as American thinkers revised their ideas of what truth was and how men might find it, so they concluded that individual man himself was the *source* of truth. From where else, they asked, might "self-evident" truth come? The standards of society, the codes of tradition, the rules of universal reason, all these might serve as the bar to which ordinary logic could be brought, but to judge the validity of the self-evident truth, only a man's inner sense could suffice.

For example, James Marsh of the University of Vermont thought in 1829 that one might discover truth "by those laws of the understanding which belong in common to all men" (a good, orthodox, 18th-century dictum), but he also suggested that one must always "try the conclusions by one's own consciousness as a final test." "It is by *self-inspection*," he continued, "that we can *alone* arrive at any rational knowledge. . . ." Young Sylvester Judd, at divinity school in the twenties, believed that one could find truth only in "the impersonal, boundless, authoritative depths of his own nature." Philosopher Caleb Sprague Henry explained that "the instantaneous but real fact of spontaneous apperception of truth" took place only in "the intimacy of individual consciousness." Theodore Parker believed that truth could be perceived best in those "great primal Intuitions of Human Nature, which depend on no logical process of demonstration, but are rather facts of consciousness given by the instinctive action of human nature itself." Orestes Brownson recognized in man "the capacity of knowing truth intuitively, or of attaining to a scientific knowledge of an order of existence transcending the reach of the senses, and of which we can have no sensible experience." George Bancroft, the historian, writing in 1835, explained that each man possessed "an internal sense . . . not that faculty which deduces inferences from the experience of the senses, but that higher faculty which from the infinite treasures of its own consciousness, *originates* truth and assents to it by the force of intuitive evidence."

By the eighteen-thirties, then, the existence of self-evident

truth—meaning that truth evident only to the individual self-consciousness—was an accepted and accomplished fact in American thought. In such fashion Coleridge, Kant, Carlyle, and Cousin displaced the great Mr. Locke and the 18th-century world of Reason; in such manner the world of Jefferson, Paine, and Rush gave way to the world of Emerson. In this context George Bancroft could quite reasonably write, as he did, an essay titled “The Promise, the Necessity, and the Reality of the Progress of the Human Race,” basing it on a generally-approved belief in the unlimited capacity of man to discover truth in, by, and for himself. Few of his contemporaries would have disputed him.

This change in the concept of the nature of truth, and in the individual's ability to identify it, powerfully influenced the 19th century's estimates of the theory of progress. The majority of American colonists had believed, of course, that the world improved by grace of God and Reason. To the 18th-century view, this forward movement of man and society was a slow, inevitable, divinely-ordained progression. Men could hasten it somewhat by revising their ideas and institutions, and they could retard it by their follies, but not by much. The drive for betterment, the 18th century thought, was inherent in the nature of life. The universal perfection of which the 18th century dreamed, however, was the ultimate substance of things hoped for, to be approached a step at a time as divinity willed it. The “melioration” of man's problems, to use a favorite contemporary word, *would* come. Men should do nothing to impede it, of course, but whether they would or not, progress was part of a huge cyclic change, a wave in the tide of affairs that could neither be stopped nor diverted.

After the turn of the 19th century, the American idea of progress became much more kinetic and positive. Emerson, quite typically, in his essay on *Fate*, believed that the “indwelling necessity” and “central intention” of all creation was nothing less than universal “harmony and joy.” His friend, William Ellery Channing, felt that a man need only “to trust, dare and be,” to have “infinite good ready for your

asking." The thinkers of the thirties made the principle of progress into a rule of life; theirs was no tentative acceptance, but a fervent, clear belief.

There were a number of reasons for this. First, some of the responsibility for improving the world had shifted from God to man, who was held much more accountable than before for determining his future. Second, the *rate* of advancement in human affairs, it was assumed, could be accelerated by man's own efforts. Progress was conceived not simply to be part of a remote, ageless cycle, but something accessible, responsive to manipulation. As Albert Brisbane wrote, men could find ways of "hastening this progress, and of anticipating results, which if left to the gradual movement of society would require centuries to effect." Third, by using government as an instrument of change, many Americans believed that in the United States, at least, one might obtain "progress by legislation"—that is, a kind of self-willed bootstrap-lifting by statute.

In science and technology, the United States believed that they had a powerful ally for betterment, not only of material life but of the intellect and spirit as well. The progress of science, wrote the geologist James Dwight Dana, "is upward as well as onward." New machinery, Salmon P. Chase wrote in *The North American Review* in 1832, represented "an almost infinite power, brought to bear on the action of the social system . . . producing almost unmixed benefit." And, too, the 19th century discovered another effective aid to progress in the principle of *association*. Men could join in societies to multiply their strengths, to do in decades (or less) by concerted effort what God and time might take eons to accomplish. William Ellery Channing explained in *The Christian Examiner* in September, 1829:

The union of minds and hands works wonders. Men grow efficient by concentrating their powers. . . . Nor is this all. Men not only accumulate power by union, but gain warmth, and earnestness. . . . Union not only brings to a point forces which before existed, and which were ineffectual through separation, but by the feeling and interest which it rouses, it becomes a

creative principle, calls forth new forces, and gives the mind a consciousness of forces, which otherwise would have been unknown.

To summarize, it may be said that after approximately 1790, the pattern of American thought had polarized about certain ideas of human nature and progress. Men generally believed in the goodness of human nature, in their capacity to find truth of a verifiable though intuitive kind, and in their ability to act upon it. They believed in progress, decreed by divine benevolence, which could be hastened by individual and cooperative effort, with the assistance of science and government. Since it was assumed that all men, not merely a few or those of a certain class, profited from this upward trend, the idea of progress was thus integrated into American democratic idealism, built into its social and intellectual framework. The consideration of almost every issue of general interest to the early 19th century was formulated and influenced in some way by these twin assumptions of individualism and progress. The acceptance of these principles thrust new responsibilities on the American individual, casting him in a new role as shaper and director of his future.

## II

In the remainder of this essay, it is my intention to trace the effects of this cluster of beliefs in three important areas of 19th-century American thought—politics, religion, and social reform. To represent the prevailing concepts of individuality and progress as they appeared in ideas and events, I shall use Andrew Jackson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William Lloyd Garrison. Each, in his way, represents one side of an equilateral triangle—Jackson the political leader, Emerson the ethical philosopher, Garrison the activist crusader for reform. All three centered their lives about these contemporary convictions about human nature and progress.

What the history books label "Jacksonian democracy," historians generally agree, was much more than Andrew Jackson's creation. Whether Old Hickory led a procession of common men to political triumph, or whether he stepped in at

the head of a parade already marching, need not concern us here. However, it is important to understand that Jacksonian democracy was the *political* manifestation of the current belief that individual man was his own master, and that *American* man, certainly, was able to control and to improve his government almost without limitation.

There were non-ideological factors involved in the rise of Jacksonism, indeed—the westward shift of population, the beginnings of western sectionalism, the rise of an urban laboring class, and so on. But there also was current in Jacksonian politics an acute awareness, never before so precisely defined in American political thinking, of the supreme consequence of the individual in government. Jefferson's trust in man, properly qualified and controlled, was well known. The Age of Jackson deified the individual—or very nearly so—and made of individual man an oracle never intended by even the most optimistic of the 18th-century philosophers. Evidence of this lies not so much in the practical politics of his time, but rather in what the American public used Jackson to symbolize and his movement to represent.

To the American public, Andrew Jackson became Individual Man incarnate.<sup>1</sup> His admirers claimed that he embodied personally all the virtues of *natural* American man, invigorated with "natural genius," free of artificiality and European taint, liberated from false tradition. Jackson was a man of *intuitive* wisdom, his biographers said; study of his life revealed how an individual could find truth out of his own mind and experience. *The Illinois Gazette* in 1824 thought Jackson "gifted with genius—with those great powers of mind that can generalize with as much ease as a common intellect can go through detail." He possessed, according to another of his eulogists, "instinctive superiority, self-reliance, and impulsive energy." He was, said another, "a master spirit . . . the architect of his own fortunes" who from an orphaned, poverty-stricken boyhood rose to eminence by relying on him-

<sup>1</sup> See John W. Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for An Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) for a more thorough treatment of this idea.

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self, "by standing and acting alone."<sup>2</sup> In 1834, *The New York Times*, almost exactly paraphrasing Bancroft's essay on popular intuitive truth, found in Old Hickory

... a mysterious light which directs his intellect, which baffles all speculation upon philosophy of mind. . . . He arrives at conclusions with a rapidity which proves that his process is not through the tardy avenues of syllogism. . . . His mind seems clogged by no forms, but goes with lightning's flash and illuminates its own pathway.

Certainly not until the later essays of Emerson, Channing, Parker, and the transcendentalists was there such lucid exposition of the superiority of Reason (in the Kantian sense) over Understanding.

The Jacksonians were politicians, not philosophers, of course, but as surely and as clearly as Emerson, they placed at the base of their political creed the same pervasive faith in the individual—as symbolized by Jackson—and in his intuitive perception of self-evident truth. John O'Sullivan, the Jacksonian editor, attempted to define this faith in an article he wrote for *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in September, 1839:

(Democracy) recognizes the distinct existence of man in himself as an independent end, not barely as a means to be merged in a mass, and controlled as a thing by public caprice or policy. His instinctive convictions, his irrepressible desires, his boundless capacity for improvement, conspire with all the indications of Providence, with all the teachings of history, and all the designs of his internal condition and adjustments, to make the doctrine of individual rights the greatest of political truths. . . .

If each man were given full freedom to take care of himself, the Jacksonians seemed to say, then God and Nature would take care of the rest. If the individual were granted his liberty, a kind of fundamental order would spontaneously arise, as O'Sullivan wrote, for there are "natural laws which will establish themselves and find their own level" if men are free.

<sup>2</sup> Any of these admiring descriptive phrases, it is worth noting, could easily have been quoted from Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, which did not appear until 1841.

George Bancroft, who like Barlow had a knack for expressing the popular mind, was a better writer than O'Sullivan and expressed this belief in a better metaphor. As each person contained within him the ability to improve himself, he explained, so the sum of individual advancements combined for total human progress, much as particles of water merged to make a wave. Bancroft was convinced that the study of history, especially American history, proved that mankind moved steadily upward. What check-point, he asked, what standard might the historian use to measure that progress and its rate? He chose the status of the *individual*, his rights, dignity, and happiness; by this standard one might judge man's progress at any selected point in history. The movement of humanity could always be measured, he believed, by the *individual's* advance. For as he wrote in his essay *The Office of the People in Art, Government, and Religion* (1835), it is certain that "The irresistible tendency of the human race is therefore to advancement. . . . The movement of the species is upward, irresistibly upward." Judged by this standard, Jacksonian America, as Bancroft observed it, represented the highest point yet reached in the species' upward march. (It is not surprising that some critics accused his *History of the United States from The Discovery of the Continent . . .*, the first volume of which appeared in 1834, of "voting for Jackson.")

Jacksonian democracy's exalted estimate of Individual Political Man, and its confident convictions of progress, found its religious analogy in the unitarian-transcendentalist movement which culminated with Emerson's ringing celebration of self-reliance in theology and ethics. Beneath the doctrinal complexities of the controversy among Calvinists, Unitarians, and transcendentalists which occupied much of the first four decades of the 19th century, there ran a single line of argument—what is the nature of man, and how may he perceive God's truth? There were a number of issues on which religious opinion was divided after 1790, but this was the most critical, since it involved agreement on the source of true revelation.

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The various disputants were willing to concede that the Bible was *one* source of general religious truth, but few could arrive at agreement about the degree and manner of its reliability. If the Bible contained truth, it must stand the test of reason; it must agree with the "facts of inward consciousness" of which Bancroft spoke and with those "self-evident" truths which entranced and puzzled the 18th century. But what if it did not? What if the Bible and the individual reason did not "speak with the same voice"? The time came when a choice had to be made between the Scriptures and the intuitions of the individual's own mind. William Ellery Channing, before Emerson the leader of the theological liberals, chose to trust the individual. "I am surer of my rational nature from God," he wrote, "than that any book is."

Channing's was a decisive step. It was not far from his position to Emerson's, which placed complete reliance on the individual in ethical and theological decisions—as the Jacksonians in the political sphere placed their confidence in the common man. And this step, too, forced a closer inspection of the nature and attributes of this self-reliant individual; the result led the New Englanders directly to that unique mixture of theology, philosophy, moralism, and sermonizing loosely called transcendentalism.

From the mid-18th century to the mid-19th in American thought, therefore, the accepted version of the individual's power to grasp and interpret God's truth underwent a complete change—from Calvin's dependence on the Bible and emphasis on the sovereignty of God, to deism's grant to man of equal sovereignty in a universe of reason, to Channing's transfer of sovereignty from Bible and church to man, and finally to the *self-reliance* of Emerson, Parker, and Thoreau. The line of thought moved from Mather's distrust of man, to Jefferson's qualified confidence in him, to Emerson's and Jackson's deep and abiding faith in his capacity to find and act upon divine truth. It was a long journey from John Cotton's struggle with man's inward dark angel, to Edwards' reluctant submission to God's rule, to Emerson's proud, confident "Know thyself! Every heart vibrates to that iron

string!" The 19th century's deification of human nature reached its climax in the essays of the Sage of Concord. *The American Scholar* deified the Individual in art and intellect; *The Divinity School Address* exalted the Individual in religion; *Self-Reliance* granted each man the right and duty to find his own moral and ethical guides.

Confidence in man (and men) runs like a bright thread through the pattern of American thought in the first half of the 19th century. The Enlightenment sought the measure of things outside man; Jefferson, who yielded to none in his respect for his fellowman, thought of him in terms of his relationships to the whole. The Age of Reason, to phrase it differently, with all its esteem for men, found them most comprehensible in group terms, most explicable in the aggregate. But Jacksonians and transcendentalists found the measure of things *within* the individual. What the Age of Reason hoped to establish as truth by empiricism and experiment, the Age of Emerson and Jackson located inside human nature, in the personal, intuitional act of cognition. Bronson Alcott explained succinctly, "It is the still, small voice of the private soul that is authentic . . . the single man's oracle." What Emerson defined as the absolute, basic fact of truth, "the coincidence of an object with a subject," was something to be privately perceived—or as he explained it in another way, one "solved the metaphor of Nature alone." "In all my lectures," Emerson wrote, "I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man." Out of secluded, intimate moments of perception, he believed, came that sudden conviction of enlightenment which men knew was true.

Because they believed in this concept of human nature, the Age of Emerson and Jackson believed it understood the world, and could control it. Viewed in these terms, the old problems of state, society, church, ethics, art, and morality seemed simplified and soluble. All human problems, in fact, according to Theodore Parker, really could be reduced to one problem, which was simply "no less than this, to reverse the experience of mankind and try its teachings by the *nature* of man." It was perhaps the last time in history that a genera-

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tion could look about, understand its universe so clearly, and embrace it with such supreme assurance.

In effect, the Jacksonians and the Emersonians gave man domain over what the 17th and 18th centuries assumed to be God's. Calvinism and deism set their Gods beyond the individual's reach—as Parker said, in realms where he "could not meet God face to face." The 19th century made deity immanent in man and deified human nature. "The idea of God," William Ellery Channing wrote, ". . . is the idea of our own spiritual nature, purified and enlarged to infinity." God became individual man infinitely projected; conversely, the individual became God. American theology and philosophy, so to speak, turned Pope's phrase into a palindrome, wherein the proper study of mankind was God, and of God, mankind.

Emersonian-transcendental thought therefore provided a philosophy, once-removed, for Jacksonism. It was unfortunate that Emerson and his followers could not accept Jackson himself as the embodiment of Transcendental Man in Politics (though logically they should have) for Jacksonism, give or take a few unphilosophical rudenesses, provided an outlet and expression for the spirit of self-reliance in a way that the Concord philosophers could not. Theodore Parker recognized this when he said that "All American history is an attempt to prove by experience the transcendental proposition of man, to organize the transcendental idea of politics." But transcendentalism was not for the Jacksonian masses, nor could Jackson's men probably have grasped the sophisticated message of *Self-Reliance* or *Politics* had they read it. The message belonged to the times, nevertheless, and what Emerson said to intellectuals, others said to the crowds.

Within the context of the early 19th century's attitudes toward the individual, his nature, and his progress, the relationships among Jacksonism, perfectionism, and transcendentalism (as well as among other lesser movements of the time) thus become visible and understandable. Spiritualism, millennialism, New Thought, Andrew Jackson Davis, the Fox Sisters, Abner Kneeland, and Phineas Quimby, among others, reflect the current faith in man's ability to find truth directly,

by his own act. All of them drew strength from the same principles. Even phrenology, pseudo-science though it may have been, found a place within the pattern. For phrenology insisted that each person was unique, and that each individual, by determination and self-training, could weaken his evil propensities and strengthen his good ones. The design of thought in the early 19th century is really, then, of one piece. William Miller's pathetic band, waiting on a New York hill-top for the coming of judgment, were poor relations of Emerson's Concordians, Finney's Perfectionists, Jackson's army of "common men," Quimby's New Thinkers, and Spurzheim's skull-scientists. Their concepts of man, progress, and truth they held in common—loosely, but in common.

A third strand in this pattern of 19th-century American thought was social reform. The preceding century, despite its Enlightenment, displayed a surprisingly callous indifference toward pain, poverty, and injustice. The 19th century saw things quite differently. Its philosophers recognized much more clearly the reality of human rights and human duties, and most important of all, they generally believed that something could be done to make society better. Institutions, like men, were vastly improveable. European observers such as Harriet Martineau rarely failed to remark on the Americans' confidence in their power to remake men and society quickly—so different, she wrote, from the "paralyzing hopelessness" of European reformers who struggled against apathy and traditionalism.

To the American reformer, the *individual* counted for everything, whether he be poor, oppressed, maladjusted, unfortunate, helpless, or even sinful. The great wave of American reform that swept through the first half of the 19th century derived from a single great purpose—to establish individual integrity and maintain individual worth. The dozens of widely disparate reform movements in the country from 1800 to 1850 held this motive in common, from the mildest of food faddists to the most relentless of abolitionists. As the editors of *The Dial* summarized the reforming spirit of the times, "The final cause of human society is the unfolding of

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*individual man*, into every form of perfection, without let or hindrance, according to the inward nature of each."

This emphasis on the individual as the focus of reform, however, posed a problem to some of the reformers. Reform was best accomplished through societies, by the joint efforts of individuals working together in common cause. The principle of "association," many believed, was the greatest reform weapon of all; the age simply proliferated associations. But how did one avoid losing the individual identity in collective action? Might not the group swallow the person? William Ellery Channing, who praised "association" one moment, also warned against it at the next. "The truth is," wrote Channing,

that our connexion with society, as it is our greatest aid, so it is our greatest peril. We are in constant danger of being spoiled of our moral judgment, and of our power over ourselves. . . . We insist on these remarks, because not a few Associations seem to us to be exceedingly exceptionable on account of their tendency to fetter men, to repress energy, to injure the free action of individuals.

For this reason, Emerson avoided societies, including those of which he approved; as Thoreau once remarked, "God does not approve of popular movements." For this reason, too, William Lloyd Garrison, who founded the first influential abolitionist society, found it very hard to cooperate even with his own friends and followers.

William Lloyd Garrison, possibly the most famous of all American reformers, provides the third symbol for the 19th century's concepts of individualism and progress as they appeared in social reform. He disliked societies, distrusted institutions, and felt trapped by organizations. His fierce personal individualism confused the crusade against slavery for more than a decade and eventually split it. Though Garrison centered his life on the task of liberating the slave, his struggle was to free *individuals*, not a race or a people. Slavery violated many natural and divine laws, but most of all, in Garrison's book, it violated the sanctity of the individual. As he said more than once, he "wanted freedom for persons, not

a class." Garrison was once asked, "Why do you work so hard for the black man when white men too are enslaved in other ways?" His reply is revealing. "I do not fight for colored men, but for *man*, whatever his complexion," he said. "So long as *one* man, black or white, remains in fetters anywhere, I fight for *him*." He saw the evils of slavery in individual terms.

This intense individualism was always part of Garrison's reforming outlook. He believed deeply in progress, as his age did, and lacking Emerson's philosophical mind or Jackson's political skill, he strove in his own angry, almost arrogant way to force it on his own society by making the individual conscience the battleground for reform. "Individual effort," he once wrote, "is the true foundation of society," a principle with which he never compromised. He was a "no government" man who once disclaimed "allegiance to any government, refused to recognize state or national boundaries, and rejected all distinctions of class, sex, or race made by society." Garrison went far beyond Thoreau in repudiating "every legislature and judicial body, all human politics, worldly honors, and stations of authority," a position which made Thoreau's mild misdemeanors seem conservative. Garrison, after all, once burned a copy of the United States Constitution in public on Independence Day and ground the ashes under his heel.

Garrison was not a man of ideas (Emerson said Garrison "neighed like a horse" whenever he tried to discuss abstract principles), but he personified better than others in the reform movement the doctrine of self-reliant individualism as it appeared in 19th-century reform. "What is a man born for, but to be a Reformer, a Remaker of what man has made?" asked Emerson, in what was almost a definition of Garrison's life. Jackson served his age as an emblem of the power of the individual in re-shaping his state. Garrison personified the power of the individual to re-form his society. Philosophically, Emerson justified them both.

### III

This, then, is the stream of ideas which lies beneath the surface of events in the Age of Jackson, Emerson, and Garrison. Faith in the merit of individual human nature, faith in the inevitability of human progress—these beliefs provided, during this interval, spirit, character, and distinctive temper for American thought. There was nothing else like it in American life, before or after. "Every spirit builds its own house," wrote Emerson, speaking to the men of his era, "and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven. Know then that the world exists for you."

Yet there were those who saw neither life nor man with the unclouded vision of an Emerson or the confidence of a Jackson. Even some of the faithful, now and then, expressed doubts about what Emily Dickinson aptly called "freckled human nature." Alcott argued for years with Emerson and Channing over what he called their "excessive individuality." Orestes Brownson, rebel though he was, decided that the individual must be subject to some sort of authority, joined the Catholic church, and concluded that individual freedom was to be obtained only within the realm of the imaginative.

The early 19th century had its Nay-sayers, men who saw shadows in the universe, and knew the power of blackness. The Yea-sayers lacked a sense of the past. Emerson did not need it; the Jacksonians rejected it; Garrison and the reformers hoped to escape it by remaking the future. But where Emerson could say that "God himself culminates in the present moment" and concern himself solely with his intuitive instant, Hawthorne instead spoke of "that visionary and impalpable *now*, which if you look at it closely, is nothing." Melville's *Pierre* followed Longfellow's confident advice to "Act, act in the living present!" and found only sheer disaster. In the same way, as Thoreau found certainty and sufficiency in the Individual Self, so Melville's theme is the insufficiency and alienation of Self. Neither Hawthorne nor Melville could accept the Emersonian dictum, "Know thyself," for what they found, when they searched within, was the desperate self-

destruction of Ahab and Ethan Brand. *Pierre*, *Moby Dick*, *Young Goodman Brown*, and *The Marble Faun* were dark books that did not belong with the optimism and hopefulness of *The American Scholar* or *Self-Reliance*, and it is equally true that behind the drums and tramplings of the Jacksonian torchlight parades there was always the cold, hard realism of John C. Calhoun, or the shadow of secession and war. These things were the underside of the intellectual pattern of the age.

Yet the dominant design of American thought in the Age of Emerson, Jackson, and Garrison was one of hope and faith. These men symbolized it. Somewhat later, at midcentury, the design was rudely shattered and the dream suddenly died. Emerson, when he read Darwin's *Origin of Species*, wrote angrily in his journal, "I refuse to be caught in the trap of biological science." But he was caught, and so was his era. At almost the same time, John Brown attacked Harper's Ferry. The Golden Age was over.

## AN EXCESS OF DEMOCRACY: THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AND THE SOCIAL PROCESS

*David Donald*

ABOUT FEW SUBJECTS do historians become so excited as about the causes of wars. War is by its nature such a monstrous evil that rational man seeks desperately to "explain" it. Most Western historians, mild men with humane intentions, can but instinctively regard war as a hideous aberration, a foul blot in the human copybook.

American historians have been especially concerned with this problem. Nearly all nurtured in a comfortable belief in progress, they have found it necessary to face the fact that the United States has not always marched onward and upward but has repeatedly backslid into the abyss of savagery. For most American wars, our historians have a comforting explanation: they were caused by somebody else. It was the British, we say, who provoked the American Revolution and the War of 1812; it was the Mexicans who incited the War of 1846; it was Spanish barbarities in Cuba which produced the War of 1898; it was German submarine atrocities which caused American entrance into World War I; it was the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor which brought us into World War II; it was Communist aggression in Korea which sent American soldiers to fight in that God-forsaken land.

But the most sanguinary of American conflicts does not lend itself to such an explanation. The American Civil War of 1861-1865 can be blamed upon nobody but the American participants themselves. It is partly for this reason that the causes of our Civil War have had an irresistible fascination for Americans. Virtually every imaginative writer of any importance in the United States since the 1860's has felt obliged to deal with this brothers' war and the subsequent reconciliation. Novelists as diverse as Mark Twain and Henry James,

Stephen Crane and Thomas Nelson Page, Margaret Mitchell and William Faulkner have exhibited a recurring, almost obsessive interest in this wholly American war. Almost every major historian of the United States has also been concerned with the problem; one thinks, for example, of Henry Adams, Edward Channing, James Ford Rhodes, John Bach McMaster, James Schouler, Hermann E. von Holst, Albert J. Beveridge, James G. Randall and Allan Nevins.

Though united in concern to explain the appalling catastrophe that befell America in the 1860's, historians of the United States have agreed upon very little else about that conflict. Many have continued to support James Ford Rhodes's flat contention that the American Civil War had "a single cause, slavery"; others have accepted Allan Nevins's modification that the cause was not Negro slavery alone but the concomitant problem of race adjustment. Disciples of Frederick Jackson Turner have found the cause of the Civil War in the growth of sectionalism, especially in the competition between sections for the newly opened West. Followers of Charles A. Beard, on the other hand, have traced the essential origin of the war to the clash of economic classes, chiefly to the inevitable conflict between Northern capitalism and Southern agrarianism. The "Revisionists" of the 1930's and 1940's, headed by Avery O. Craven and James G. Randall, argued that the Civil War had no basic causes; that it was a "repressible conflict," a "needless war," precipitated through want of wisdom in the "blundering generation" of the 1850's. More recently, critics, who styled themselves "New Nationalists," have replied sharply that the Revisionists were blind to the enormous evil of slavery and sought "in optimistic sentimentalism an escape from the severe demands of moral decision."

Acrimoniously American historians have argued over the degree to which individual politicians and statesmen were responsible for the Civil War. Presidents Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, and Abraham Lincoln have all been accused of bringing on the war, but all three have had vigorous defenders. George Fort Milton and other scholars rehabilitated the reputation of Stephen A. Douglas as the statesman

of sectional conciliation, but Allan Nevins has continued to brand the Illinois "Little Giant" as a morally obtuse and disastrously short-sighted politician. Frank L. Owsley, a Southern-born historian, squarely blamed Northern abolitionists; "neither Dr. Goebbels nor Virginia Gayda nor Stalin's propaganda agents," he wrote in 1941, "were able to plumb the depths of vulgarity and obscenity reached and maintained by . . . Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and other abolitionists of note." Historians of Northern origin retorted angrily that the blame should more properly fall upon Southern "fire-eaters," who precipitated secession. Craven and Randall attacked with equal vigor the "extremists" and "agitators" of all sections, the disciples of John C. Calhoun along with the followers of William Lloyd Garrison.

It is sometimes mistakenly maintained that the basic issue over which these historians have so confusingly argued is that of the inevitability of the Civil War. Such a view is an oversimplification, for, as the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl sensibly remarks, "The question of evitability or inevitability is one on which the historian can never form any but an ambivalent opinion." So much depends upon speculations which historians are properly reluctant to make. If Jefferson Davis's government had refused to fight for independence, there could, of course, have been no war. Similarly, if Lincoln's administration had acquiesced in the peaceful secession of the South, there would have been no conflict. The question of inevitability is also partly a matter of timing. Virtually no one would argue that a Civil War was inescapable as early as 1820 or 1830; hardly anyone would suggest that it was avoidable after the first gun was fired on Fort Sumter.

The real cleavage in American historical thought is, instead, between those who see the Civil War as the result of the operation of grand elemental forces and those who attribute it to the working of accidental or random factors. The former discuss the war as the result of deep national urges, basic social or economic cleavages, and fundamental nationalistic drives; the latter argue that these alleged fundamental "causes" have no demonstrated connection with the course

of events in the 1850's and stress the importance of accident, of personality, and of propaganda in shaping history.

Neither of these rival interpretations is entirely satisfactory. The "Fundamentalists" (if we may so call them) have failed to prove that their underlying "causes" produced the actual outbreak of hostilities. They talk impressively about Southern economic grievances—but never demonstrate that such issues as the tariff or internal improvements played any significant part in bringing on the actual secession crisis. The rise of Southern nationalism is another of these general explanations that sound impressive—until one realizes, after making a study of the Confederacy, that Southern nationalism during the Civil War was anything but a strong unifying force. It is plausible to stress slavery as the cause of the Civil War, but, as Revisionists have repeatedly pointed out, no responsible political body in the North in 1860 proposed to do anything at all about slavery where it actually existed and no numerous group of Southerners thought their peculiar institution could be extended into the free states. As for Allan Nevins's emphasis upon the problems of race adjustment, one must note that virtually nobody, North or South, was concerned with such matters in the 1850's.

The problem with all these Fundamentalist explanations is that they rely upon stereotypes which have little relation to the complex social reality of the United States in the 1850's. Writers speak of the Southern interest in slavery, even when they perfectly well know that in the "plantation" South only one-fourth of the white families owned any slaves at all. They talk of "industrial" New England, though over half of the population of that region still lived on farms. They write of the small farmers of the "frontier" West, even though that section had a remarkable urban development and even though it was partly settled by men like Michael Sullivant, "the world's largest farmer," who owned 80,000 acres of rich Illinois soil, employed between 100 and 200 laborers, and had 5,000 head of cattle grazing in his own pastures.

On the other hand, it is equally difficult to accept the Revisionist argument that happenstance developments—such as

the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in 1854 or John Brown's raid—produced the war, if only because one dislikes to give up the old maxim that great events have great causes. If it is true that the hottest issue of the 1850's was not race adjustment or the future of slavery itself but the spread of slavery into the few remaining territories of the United States, do we not have to inquire why public opinion, North and South, grew so sensitive over what appears to be an abstract and unimportant point? If we must admit that propagandists and agitators, abolitionists and fire-eaters, whipped up sentiment in both sections, are we not required to ask further why that public opinion could be thus roiled, and why on these specific issues? And if we are bound to agree that the 1850's saw a failure of American statesmanship, do we not have to seek why this disaster afflicted the United States at this particular time and in this peculiar manner?

### I

Since neither Revisionism nor Fundamentalism offers an intellectually satisfying explanation for the coming of the Civil War, perhaps the problem should be approached afresh. The Civil War, I believe, can best be understood neither as the result of accident nor as the product of conflicting sectional interests, but as the outgrowth of social processes which affected the entire United States during the first half of the 19th century.

It is remarkable how few historians have attempted to deal with American society as a whole during this critical period. Accustomed to looking upon it as a pre-war era, we have stressed divisive elements and factors of sectional conflict. Contemporary European observers, on the whole, had a better perspective. Some of these foreign travelers looked upon the American experiment with loathing; others longed for its success; but nearly all stressed the basic unity of American culture, minimizing the ten percent of ideas and traits which were distinctive to the individual sections and stressing the ninety percent of attitudes and institutions which all Americans shared.

It is time for us to emulate the best of these European observers and to draw a broad picture of the common American values in the early 19th century. Any such analysis would have to start with the newness of American life. Novelty was the keynote not merely for the recently settled regions of the West but for all of American society. Though states like Virginia and Massachusetts had two hundred years of history behind them, they, too, were affected by social changes so rapid as to require each generation to start anew. In the Northeast, the rise of the city shockingly disrupted the normal course of societal evolution. Boston, for example, grew from a tidy, inbred city of 40,000 in 1830 to a sprawling, unmanageable metropolis of 178,000 by 1860; New York leaped from 515,000 to 805,000 in the single decade of the 1850's. This kind of urban life was as genuinely a frontier experience as settling on the Great Plains; to hundreds of thousands of European-born immigrants and American farm boys and girls, moving to the big city was an enormously exhilarating and unsettling form of pioneering. In the Old South, the long-settled states of the Eastern coast were undergoing a parallel evolution, for the opening of rich alluvial lands along the Gulf Coast offered bonanzas as surely as did the gold mines of California. In the early 19th century all sections of the United States were being transformed with such rapidity that stability and security were everywhere vanishing values; nowhere could a father safely predict what kind of world his son would grow up in.

Plenty was another characteristic of this new American society. From the richness of the country's basic resources, Americans, as David M. Potter has observed, ought to be called "The People of Plenty." The land begged to be developed. Immigrants from less privileged lands found it almost impossible to credit the abundance which everywhere surrounded them. As settlers in the Wabash Valley sang:

Way down upon the Wabash  
Such lands were never known.  
If Adam had passed over it,  
This soil he'd surely own.

He'd think it was the Garden  
He played in when a boy,  
And straight he'd call it Eden  
In the State of Illinois.

Mineral wealth surpassed men's dreams. And there was nothing to divert Americans from the exploitation of their resources. As Tocqueville pointed out, the absence of strong neighbors to the north and the south gave the United States a peculiar position among the 19th-century powers; she alone could devote her entire energies to the creation of wealth, instead of wasting them upon arms and warlike preparations. Some Americans made their fortunes in manufacturing; others in cotton and rice plantations; still others in the mines and lands of the West. Not everybody got rich, of course, but everybody aspired to do so. Both the successful and those less fortunate were equally ruthless in exploiting the country's natural resources, whether of water power, of fertile fields, of mineral wealth, or simply of human labor.

Rapid social mobility was another dominant American trait. Though some recent sociological studies have correctly warned us that the Horatio Alger stories represent a myth rather than a reality of American society and that, even in the early 19th century education, family standing, and inherited wealth were valuable assets, we must not forget that there was nevertheless an extraordinary opportunity in the United States for poor boys to make good. Surely in no other Western society of the period could a self-taught merchant's apprentice have founded the manufacturing dynasty of the Massachusetts Lawrences; or a semi-literate ferry-boatman named Vanderbilt have gained control of New York City's transportation system; or the son of a London dried-fish shopkeeper named Benjamin have become Senator from Louisiana; or a self-taught prairie lawyer have been elected President of the nation.

Such vertical mobility was not confined to any class or section in the United States. Though most of us are willing to accept the rags-to-riches version of frontier society, we often fail to realize that everywhere in America the early 19th cen-

tury was the day of the self-made man. The Boston Brahmins, as Cleveland Amory has wittily pointed out, were essentially *nouveaux riches*; the Proper Bostonians' handsome houses on Beacon Hill, their affectations of social superiority, their illusions of hearing ancestral voices concealed the fact that most of them derived from quite humble origins, and within the last generation or two. In the South there were, of course, a few fine old families—but not nearly so many as the F.F.V.'s fondly fancied—but these were not the leaders of Southern society. The typical figure of the antebellum South is not Robert E. Lee but tight-fisted Thomas Sutpen, William Faulkner's fictional character, whose unscrupulous rise from hardscrabble beginnings to the planter class is traced in *Absalom, Absalom.*

## II

A new society of plenty, with abundant opportunities for self-advancement, was bound to leave its hallmark upon its citizens, whether they lived in North, South, or West. The connection between character and culture is still an essentially unexplored one, but it is surely no accident that certain widely shared characteristics appeared among Americans in every rank of life. In such a society, richly endowed with every natural resource, protected against serious foreign wars, and structured so as to encourage men to rise, it was inevitable that a faith in progress should be generally shared. The idea of progress is not, of course, an American invention, and no claim is even suggested here that 19th-century Americans were unique. Indeed, the American experience is merely a special case of the sweeping social transformation which was more slowly changing Europe as well. But American circumstances did make for a particularly verdant belief that betterment, whether economic, social, or moral, was just around the corner. Surely Mark Twain's Colonel Beriah Sellers is, if not a unique American type, the representative American citizen of his age.

Confidence in the future encouraged Americans in their tendency to speculate. A man of even very modest means

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might anticipate making his fortune, not through exertions of his own but through the waves of prosperity which seemed constantly to float American values higher and higher. A small initial capital could make a man another John Jacob Astor. "I have now a young man in my mind," wrote C. C. Andrews from Minnesota in 1856, "who came to a town ten miles this side of St. Paul, six months ago, with \$400. He commenced trading, and has already, by good investments and the profits of his business, doubled his money." It was no wonder that Americans rejected the safe investment, the "sure thing," to try a flier into the unknown. In some cases, the American speculative mania was pathological. A writer in November, 1849, described the frenzied state of mind of Californians:

The people of San Francisco are mad, stark mad. . . . A dozen times or more, during the last few weeks, I have been taken by the arm by some of the *millionaires*—so they call themselves, I call them madmen—of San Francisco, looking wondrously dirty and out at elbows for men of such magnificent pretensions. They have dragged me about, through the mud and filth almost up to my middle, from one pine box to another, called mansion, hotel, bank, or store, as it may please the imagination, and have told me, with a sincerity that would have done credit to the Bedlamite, that these splendid . . . structures were theirs, and they, the fortunate proprietors, were worth from two to three hundred thousand dollars a year each.

But one does not have to turn to the gold rush of California to learn what abundance can do to social values. A sympathetic contemporary Southerner, Joseph G. Baldwin, described "The Flush Times in Mississippi and Alabama," when the virgin lands in that region were first opened to settlement.

... the new era had set in—the era of the second great experiment of independence: the experiment, namely, of credit without capital, and enterprise without honesty. . . . Every cross-road and every avocation presented an opening,—through which a fortune was seen by the adventurer in near perspective. Credit was a thing of course. To refuse it—if the thing was ever done—were an insult for which a bowie-knife were not a

too summary or exemplary means of redress . . . prices rose like smoke. Lots in obscure villages were held at city prices; lands, bought at the minimum cost of government, were sold at from thirty to forty dollars an acre. . . . Society was wholly unorganized: there was no restraining public opinion: the law was well-nigh powerless—and religion scarcely was heard of except as furnishing the oaths and *technics* of profanity. . . . Money, got without work, . . . turned the heads of its possessors, and they spent it with a recklessness like that with which they gained it. The pursuits of industry neglected, riot and coarse debauchery filled up the vacant hours. . . . The . . . doggeries . . . were in full blast in those days, no village having less than a half-dozen all busy all the time: gaming and horse-racing were polite and well patronized amusements. . . . Occasionally the scene was diversified by a murder or two, which though perpetrated from behind a corner, or behind the back of the deceased, whenever the accused *chose* to stand his trial, was always found to have been committed in self-defence. . . . The old rules of business and the calculations of prudence were alike disregarded, and profligacy, in all the departments . . . , held riotous carnival. Larceny grew not only respectable, but genteel, and ruffled it in all the pomp of purple and fine linen. Swindling was raised to the dignity of the fine arts. Felony came forth from its covert, put on more seemly habiliments, and took its seat with unabashed front in the upper places of the synagogue. . . .

"Commerce was king"—and Rag, Tag and Bobtail his cabinet council. . . . The condition of society may be imagined:—vulgarity—ignorance—fussy and arrogant pretension—unmitigated rowdyism—bullying insolence. . . .

Allowance must, of course, be made for a writer of imaginative fiction, but there is a basic truth in Baldwin's observations. In 19th-century America all the recognized values of orderly civilization were gradually being eroded. Social atomization affected every segment of American society. All too accurately Tocqueville portrayed the character of the new generation of Southerners: "The citizen of the Southern states becomes a sort of domestic dictator from infancy; the first notion he acquires in life is that he was born to command, and the first habit he contracts is that of ruling without resistance. His education tends, then, to give him the character of a haughty and hasty man—irascible, violent,

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ardent in his desires, impatient of obstacles." William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, graphically depicted the even cruder settlers in the West:

These men could shave a horse's main [sic] and tail, paint, disfigure and offer him for sale to the owner in the very act of inquiring for his own horse. . . . They could hoop up in a hogshead a drunken man, they being themselves drunk, put in and nail down the head, and roll the man down New Salem hill a hundred feet or more. They could run down a lean, hungry wild pig, catch it, heat a ten-plate stove furnace hot, and putting in the pig, could cook it, they dancing the while a merry jig.

Even the most intimate domestic relations were drastically altered in 19th-century America. For centuries the Western tradition had been one in which females were subordinate to males, and in which the wife found her full being only in her husband. But in the pre-Civil War United States such a social order was no longer possible. In Massachusetts, for example, which in 1850 had 17,480 more females than males, many women could no longer look to their normal fulfillment in marriage and a family; if they were from the lower classes they must labor to support themselves, and if they were from the upper classes they must find satisfaction in charitable deeds and humanitarian enterprises. It is not altogether surprising that so many reform movements had their roots in New England. In the West, on the other hand, women were at a great premium; however old or ugly, they found themselves marriageable. One reads, for example, of a company of forty-one women who traveled from the East to frontier Iowa. Before their steamship could reach the wharf, the shore was crowded with men using megaphones to make proposals of marriage; "Miss with the blue ribbon in your bonnet, will you take me?" "Hallo thar, gal, with a cinnamon shawl; if agreeable we will jine." It was, consequently, extremely difficult to persuade these ladies that, after marriage, they had no legal existence except as chattels of their husbands. Not surprisingly, woman's suffrage, as a practical movement, flourished in the West.

Children in such a society of abundance were an economic asset. A standard toast to wedding couples was: "Health to the groom, and here's to the bride, thumping luck, and big children." Partly because they were so valuable, children were well cared for and given great freedom. Virtually every European traveler in the 19th century remarked the uncurbed egotism of the American child: "Boys assume the air of full grown coxcombs." "Parents have no command over their children." "The children's faces were dirty, their hair uncombed, their disposition evidently untaught, and all the members of the family, from the boy of six years of age up to the owner (I was going to say master) of the house, appeared independent of each other." "The lad of fourteen . . . struts and swaggers and smokes his cigar and drinks rum; treads on the toes of his grandfather, swears at his mother and sister, and vows that he will run away . . . the children govern the parents."

This child was father of the American man. It is no wonder that Tocqueville, attempting to characterize 19th-century American society, was obliged to invent a new word, "individualism." This is not to argue that there were in pre-Civil War America no men of orderly, prudent, and conservative habits; it is to suggest that rarely in human history has a people as a whole felt itself so completely unfettered by precedent. In a nation so new that, as President James K. Polk observed, its history was in the future, in a land of such abundance, men felt under no obligation to respect the lessons of the past. Even in the field of artistic and literary endeavor acceptance of classical forms or acquiescence in the dictates of criticism was regarded as evidence of inferiority. Ralph Waldo Emerson set the theme for 19th-century Americans: "Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men. . . . Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. . . . Yourself a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost, cast behind you all conformity. . . ."

Every aspect of American life witnessed this desire to

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throw off precedent and to rebel from authority. Every institution which laid claim to prescriptive right was challenged and overthrown. The church, that potent instrument of social cohesion in the colonial period, was first disestablished, and then strange new sects, such as the Shakers, Mormons, and Campbellites, appeared to fragment the Christian community. The squirearchy, once a powerful conservative influence in the Middle States and the South, was undermined by the abolition of primogeniture and entails and then was directly defied in the Anti-Rent Wars of New York. All centralizing economic institutions came under attack. The Second Bank of the United States, which exercised a healthy restraint upon financial chaos, was destroyed during the Jackson period, and at the same time the Supreme Court moved to strike down vested monopoly rights.

Nowhere was the American rejection of authority more complete than in the political sphere. The decline in the powers of the federal government from the constructive centralism of George Washington's administration to the feeble vacillation of James Buchanan's is so familiar as to require no repetition here. With declining powers there went also declining respect. Leonard D. White's scholarly works on American administrative history accurately trace the descending status and the decreasing skill of the federal government employees. The national government, moreover, was not being weakened in order to bolster the state governments, for they, too, were decreasing in power. The learned historians of Massachusetts during these years, Oscar and Mary Handlin, find the theme of their story in the abandonment of the idea of "Commonwealth," in the gradual forgetting of the ideal of the purposeful state which had once concerted the interests of all its subordinate groups. By the 1850's, the authority of all government in America was at a low point; government to the American was, at most, merely an institution with a negative role, a guardian of fair play.

Declining power of government was paralleled by increased popular participation in it. The extension of the suffrage in America has rarely been the result of a concerted reform

drive, such as culminated in England in 1832 and in 1867; rather it has been part of the gradual erosion of all authority, of the feeling that restraints and differentials are necessarily antidemocratic, and of the practical fact that such restrictions are difficult to enforce. By the mid-19th century in most American states white manhood suffrage was virtually universal.

All too rarely have historians given sufficient attention to the consequences of the extension of the franchise in America, an extension which was only one aspect of the general democratic rejection of authority. Different appeals must necessarily be made to a broad electorate than to an elite group. Since the rival parties must both woo the mass of voters, both tended to play down issues and to stand on broad equivocal platforms which evaded all subjects of controversy. Candidates were selected not because of their demonstrated statesmanship but because of their high public visibility. The rash of military men who ran for President in the 1840's and 1850's was no accident. If it is a bit too harsh to say that extension of the suffrage inevitably produced leaders without policies and parties without principles, it can be safely maintained that universal democracy made it difficult to deal with issues requiring subtle understanding and delicate handling. Walter Bagehot, that shrewd English observer, was one of the few commentators who accurately appreciated the changes that universal suffrage brought to American life. Writing in October, 1861, he declared: "The steadily augmenting power of the lower orders in America has naturally augmented the dangers of the Federal Union. . . . a dead level of universal suffrage runs, more or less, over the whole length of the United States. . . . it places the entire control over the political action of the whole State in the hands of common labourers, who are of all classes the least instructed—of all the most aggressive—of all the most likely to be influenced by local animosity—of all the most likely to exaggerate every momentary sentiment—of all the least likely to be capable of a considerable toleration for the constant oppositions of opinion, the not infrequent differences of interests, and the occasional

unreasonableness of other States. . . . The unpleasantness of mob government has never before been exemplified so conspicuously, for it never before has worked upon so large a scene."

One does not, of course, have to accept the Tory accent to recognize the validity of Bagehot's analysis. Simply because Americans by the middle of the 19th century suffered from an excess of liberty, they were increasingly unable to arrive at reasoned, independent judgments upon the problems which faced their society. The permanent revolution that was America had freed its citizens from the bonds of prescription and custom but had left them leaderless. Inevitably, the reverse side of the coin of individualism is labeled conformity. Huddling together in their loneliness, they sought only to escape their freedom. Fads, fashions, and crazes swept the country. Religious revivalism reached a new peak in the 1850's. Hysterical fears and paranoid suspicions marked this shift of Americans to "other-directedness." Never was there a field so fertile before the propagandist, the agitator, the extremist.

### III

These dangerously divisive tendencies in American society did not, of course, go unnoticed. Tocqueville and other European observers were aware of the perils of social atomization and predicted that, under shock, the union might be divided. Nor were all Americans indifferent to the drift of events. Repeatedly in the Middle Period conservative statesmen tried to check the widespread social disorganization. Henry Clay, for example, attempted to revive the idea of the national interest, superior to local and individual interests, by binding together the sections in his American System: the West should produce the nation's food; the South its staples; and the East its manufactures. The chief purpose of Daniel Webster's great patriotic orations was to stimulate a national feeling based on shared traditions, values, and beliefs. Taking as his twin maxims, "The best authority for the support of a particular provision in government is experience . . . , and

"Because a thing has been wrongly done, it does not therefore follow that it can now be undone . . .," Webster tried to preserve the Union from shocks and rapid change. John C. Calhoun, too, argued for uniting "the most opposite and conflicting interests . . . into one common attachment to the country" through protecting the rights of minorities. With suitable guarantees to vested sectional interests (notably to slavery), Calhoun predicted that "the community would become a unity, by becoming a common centre of attachment of all its parts. And hence, instead of faction, strife, and struggle for party ascendency, there would be patriotism, nationality, harmony, and a struggle only for supremacy in promoting the common good of the whole."

Nor did conservative statesmanship die with the generation of Webster, Clay, and Calhoun. Down to the very outbreak of the Civil War old Whigs like John Jordan Crittenden, John Bell, and Edward Everett argued for adjustment of sectional claims to the national interest. Abraham Lincoln, another former Whig, tried to check the majoritarianism of his fellow-countrymen by harking back to the Declaration of Independence, which he termed the "sheet anchor of our principles." In the doctrine that all men are created equal, Lincoln found justification for his belief that there were some rights upon which no majority, however large or however democratic, might infringe. Majority rule, he maintained, could no more justify the extension of slavery to the territories than majority rule could disenfranchise the Irish, or the Catholics, or the laboring men of America. Soberly he warned that in a country like America, where there was no prescriptive right, the future of democratic government depended upon the willingness of its citizens to admit moral limits to their political powers.

None of these attempts to curb the tyranny of the majority was successful; all went too strongly against the democratic current of the age. American society was changing so rapidly that there was no true conservative group or interest to which a statesman could safely appeal. Webster, it is clear, would have preferred to find his following among yeoman farmers,

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holding approximately equal wealth; instead he was obliged to rely upon the banking, manufacturing, and speculative interests of the Northeast, the hard, grasping, arriviste element of society, a group which had itself risen through the democratic process. These special interests used Webster to secure tariffs, banking acts, and internal improvement legislation favorable to themselves, but they selfishly dropped him when he talked of subordinating their local particularism to the broad national interest.

Similarly, Calhoun sought a conservative backing in the plantation aristocracy, the same aristocracy which in a previous generation had produced George Washington, James Madison, and John Marshall. But while Calhoun prated of a Greek democracy, in which all white men, freed by Negro slavery of the burdens of menial labor, could deliberate upon statesmanlike solutions to the nation's problems, the conservative aristocracy upon which his theories depended was vanishing. Political and economic leadership moved from Virginia first to South Carolina, then to Mississippi. The educated, cosmopolitan plantation owners of the 1780's disappeared; in their place emerged the provincial Southron, whose sentiments were precisely expressed by an up-country South Carolinian: "I'll give you my notion of things; I go first for Greenville, then for Greenville District, then for the up-country, then for South Carolina, then for the South, then for the United States; and after that I don't go for anything. I've no use for Englishmen, Turks and Chinese." These slavemasters of the new cotton kingdom endorsed Calhoun and his doctrines so long as their own vested interests were being protected; after that, they ignored his conservative philosophy.

Possibly in time this disorganized society might have evolved a genuinely conservative solution for its problems, but time ran against it. At a stage when the United States was least capable of enduring shock, the nation was obliged to undergo a series of crises, largely triggered by the physical expansion of the country. The annexation of Texas, the war with Mexico, and the settlement of California and Oregon

posed inescapable problems of organizing and governing this new empire. Something had to be done, yet any action was bound to arouse local, sectional hostilities. Similarly, in 1854 it was necessary to organize the Great Plains territory, but, as Stephen A. Douglas painfully learned, organizing it without slavery alienated the South, organizing it with slavery offended the North, and organizing it under popular sovereignty outraged both sections.

As if these existential necessities did not impose enough strains upon a disorganized society, well intentioned individuals insisted upon adding others. The quite unnecessary shock administered by the Dred Scott decision in 1857 is a case in point; justices from the antislavery North and the proslavery South, determined to settle the slavery issue, once and for all, produced opinions which in fact settled nothing but only led to further alienation and embitterment. Equally unnecessary, of course, was the far ruder shock which crazy John Brown and his little band administered two years later when they decided to solve the nation's problems by taking the law into their own hands at Harper's Ferry.

These crises which afflicted the United States in the 1850's were not in themselves calamitous experiences. Revisionist historians have correctly pointed out how little was actually at stake: slavery did not go into New Mexico or Arizona; Kansas, after having been opened to the peculiar institution for six years, had only two Negro slaves; the Dred Scott decision declared an already repealed law unconstitutional; John Brown's raid had no significant support in the North and certainly roused no visible enthusiasm among Southern Negroes. When compared to crises which other nations have resolved without great discomfort, the true proportions of these exaggerated disturbances appear.

But American society in the 1850's was singularly ill equipped to meet any shocks, however weak. It was a society so new and so disorganized that its nerves were rawly exposed. It was, as Henry James noted, a land which had "No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country

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gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great universities nor public schools . . . ; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society"—in short, which had no resistance to strain. The very similarity of the social processes which affected all sections of the country—the expansion of the frontier, the rise of the city, the exploitation of great natural wealth—produced not cohesion but individualism. The structure of the American political system impeded the appearance of conservative statesmanship, and the rapidity of the crises in the 1850's prevented conservatism from crystallizing. The crises themselves were not world-shaking, nor did they inevitably produce war. They were, however, the chisel strokes which revealed the fundamental flaws in the block of marble, flaws which stemmed from an excess of democracy.

## THE FIGHTING YANKEE

*Earl Schenck Miers*

### I

HENRY ADAMS, RETURNING from a tour of the continent, reached the beloved Quincy of his ancestors in the closing weeks of the turbulent presidential campaign of 1860. He watched Wide Awakes for Lincoln marching in their oilcloth capes and years later the memory of that scene shocked Henry. Into his mind flashed the images of those marchers coming down a hillside, rank upon rank, with their flickering torches held aloft; they had organized, he believed now, "in a form military in all things except weapons." Almost as though condemning the American Bundists of a much later generation, Henry added growlily: "Let them pretend what they liked, their air was not that of innocence."

A David Harum streak in Henry Adams, driving him incessantly to wring some emotional profit from every experience, at times revealed nothing so clearly as the fact that even Henry could lose touch with the intellectual currents of his age. In 1860 Republicanism had become such a patchwork of expediencies that no one could speak for it with authority—least of all the man in Massachusetts, where to win the gubernatorial election of 1854 the Republican Party had become a lovenest of Free Soilers and the Know Nothings. The very political shenanigans that made Republicanism work in Massachusetts had led Lincoln for many months to look upon the party as he might have viewed a she-adder. "I do not perceive," he said upon the subject of Know Nothingism, "how anyone professing to be sensitive to the wrongs of the negroes, can join in a league to degrade a class of white men." The Massachusetts politician could, quite easily; aside from South Carolina during those prewar years, it was difficult to find a state that could exhibit greater intemperance in its political

passions than the homeland of Charles Sumner and the Reverend Theodore Parker, of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips.

Perhaps Henry Adams, considering all the factors, did speak accurately for the Wide Awakes of Massachusetts in 1860; perhaps, subconsciously, they had been ready for war even before the ballots were counted; but the vast majority of Northerners elsewhere neither wanted war nor accepted it as inevitable. Indeed, few were the Northerners who ever had seen a man in uniform, so little did military experience influence their lives. In the six agonizing weeks between Lincoln's inauguration and the firing on Sumter, their prayer was that secession would wither in the sunlight. Not one in ten saw so clearly as outspoken Judge John A. Campbell of Alabama why the conflict had become "irrepressible" and all efforts at compromise were doomed because years of unrestrained agitation in pulpit, press, and academy, North and South, had produced a crisis "against which laws are powerless unless supported by an inquisition or an army."

At Sumter, when the talk turned to shooting, the Confederacy reversed the North's delusion, hoping that opposition to secession would wither in the sunlight once Northerners recognized how little Southern independence threatened their way of life. But the South was far too fond of gaining wisdom by contemplating its navel, and so it always misjudged the emotional intensity of Northerners like James L. Hill, who, writing to Lincoln from Springfield, described himself as "your old crippled friend that has always stood by you for the last 20 years." Passionately Hill begged the President never to allow "our Glorious old Flag that Washington through so many trials and Privations unfurled and sustained" to become "the hiss and scoff of the World." Boys who had thrilled to Parson Weems's *Life of Washington* (Lincoln among them) were not ashamed, as men, to profess their love of country; and the ardent patriotism that would sweep like a tidal wave over the North with the attack on Sumter was poignantly reflected in a small item in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*: "Three men, apparently la-

borers, reading the despatches, wept when they learned the flag had been hauled down."

Across the seas the British might be puzzled by their quarrelsome American cousins, and the London *Times* well might ask: "Are they in earnest, or are they playing at war, or dreaming that they strike, and still strike not?"; but in Chicago the *Tribune's* reporter, mingling with "Germans congregated in their saloons and bier-halls [sic]," realized that these citizens-by-adoption were "brimful of patriotism and zeal for the country and the Government." The Connecticut of Nathan Hale and Henry Ward Beecher made April fourteenth "Battle Sunday" when its clergymen were to pray that "the foes of the nation might be smitten down"; and in New York City politically influential Simeon Draper, organizing a rally to sustain the President, gave shrewd advice to his wealthy friends in the Union League Club: "Damn the swallow-tails; let's go for the groundtier!" The New York *Times* sensed the essence of the news: "Nothing for years [has] brought the hearts of all the people so close together."

## II

Of course, the fighting Yankee, drilling with his broomsticks, wished only to repress the "rebellion" and return to the sensible occupations of a country restored to peace. Not for a moment did it occur to him then that he might be caught up in a profound social revolution, the impact of which could outlive him by more than a century; or that the war could teach him lessons he would prefer not to learn. Like his Southern brother, the Northerner rushed off to possible battle, giddy-headed.

And like his Southern brother, the Northerner borrowed the image of himself as a warrior. Soon the streets of city, town, and hamlet, North and South, became a flashy spectacle of battle-bound brothers wearing the baggy red trousers of the Zouaves of Algeria; and gaudiness reached equally imaginative extremes as the Thirty-Ninth New York Infantry, calling themselves the Garibaldi Guards, adopted even the plumed hats of the Italian Bersaglieri and the Seventy-Ninth

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New York in their Scottish sporrans and kilts became known as the Highlanders. Early in the conflict, the North adopted its official blue and the South its gray, but Southern troops who had invested in blue uniforms or Northern regiments like the Second Wisconsin who had paid for their own smart gray outfits clung to these local choices until by mistake enough of them had been shot in battle by confused comrades-in-arms.

True, few wars have had more ridiculous beginnings. Ultimately, a day came when both contestants perceived that its dimensions were larger than a Dixie knife-fight or a border barroom brawl; then, as Robert E. Lee had written to his wife during his first weeks in Richmond, the bitter truth was accepted—this war might last ten years. Moreover, it could not be fought with borrowed images, either of troops or their generals. Quickly thereafter Beauregard as the “Napoleon in Gray” and McClellan as the “Napoleon in Blue” faded from the limelight into which early events had thrust them; and the later heroes, the enduring heroes, were all as native a product as the war itself.

Once the hidden war emerged—or, perhaps more accurately, once the war had been organized into the business-like enterprise it must become to fit the evolving American pattern—then the real representatives of past opposed to future stepped forward. Then out of the competing forms of democracy struggling to control the Republic—the wage-labor of the industrial North vs. the slave-labor of the agrarian South—came the heroes bred of both systems. And since this was a complex war of ideas confounded by ideals, not surprisingly they came in pairs, so that Lee, the noble Virginian who led an army enlisted in heaven, was always best when supported by the harsh discipline and dreadful vengeance of Stonewall Jackson, riding along in a uniform held together with catch-pins; and the imaginative Grant, who often paralyzed the enemy with the extravagance of his losses, and who became the superb conqueror of hostile armies, also needed the fidgety Sherman, who outflanked the enemy by swift movements, and who became the effective conqueror of a hostile people.

In battle, both North and South fought magnificently, which of course was not enough. Both North and South with time learned to live with a new style of war in which balloons were sent aloft to spy on the enemy, in which reporters were everywhere snooping out military information and photographers lugged wagon-loads of equipment over roads already clogged with marching men, in which civilian entertainers roamed the camps and politicians bargained for future votes with barrels of whiskey, in which nurses and doctors appeared with their own peculiar ideas of humanity amidst man's inhumanity, and in which sutlers and cotton speculators vied with opportunistic generals for a fast buck. Nor was this the sum of it, for the war rewrote military rule books—by using cavalry as mobile infantry, by refuting the old West Point dogma that digging trenches made men cowardly, by blasting the wooden navies of the world to Kingdom Come in a single day at Hampton Roads, by putting new weapons like the Spencer repeating rifle into the hands of farm boys who had thought men were hunted like squirrels, and by systematically searching out grafters who sold the army shoes with soles filled with shavings and uniforms made of old cloth, ground up and refabricated. If such accomplishments had been sufficient, then the war should have ended in early July of 1863 when the South lost at Gettysburg one day and Vicksburg surrendered the next.

## III

But winning battles was never quite enough. The South, to the extent it struggled to keep what it already had, might have survived if a decisive military victory had been quickly gained; but the North, as Lincoln said from the start, was engaged in "a People's contest"—in a struggle "for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is . . . to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life." A very pretty speech, really—once again, in this special war message to Congress on July 4, 1861, a note of eloquence had not failed Lincoln; and yet to the fighting Yankee then expecting to be home by

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Christmas these remarks by Mr. Lincoln must have read like a piece of prosy optimism from the pen of Ralph Waldo Emerson. To teach the fighting Yankee to dress for battle like a sane man, to badger him into accepting discipline, and to adapt him to new and deadlier techniques of killing his fellow man were by far the easier, if still difficult part of the struggle; but in order to win "a People's contest" more than his nerve and shooting eye were needed; he must fight also with mind and heart.

Many were the architects who led the fighting Yankee to accepting this final responsibility—Lincoln more than anyone, Julia Ward Howe for another, Edward Lillie Pierce for a third, among others. And if one had to pinpoint a time when this essential victory began to take form, February, 1862 would seem to be a climactic month. On the twenty-first of that month, for a starter, a slave runner from Maine, Nathaniel Gordon, became the first and only American ever to hang for his crime—or, to use the more retributive phrase of the *New York Times*, to expire as "a lump of dishonored clay." Even so, Lincoln and his Administration had dallied with their consciences before consenting to Gordon's execution, for reasons that the editors of *Harper's Weekly* understood. True, for forty years the slave trade had been considered piracy, and to engage in it had been a capital offense, but, as *Harper's Weekly* pointed out, the "sympathy" of the national government had been so often on the side of the culprit that it had seemed "absurd to hang a man for doing at sea that which, in half the Union, is done daily without censure on land." At last on February 21, 1862, the Federal government faced up to the law and Gordon went to the gallows—in the same month when in the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly* the North read Mrs. Howe's "better words" to the stirring, if borrowed melody of "John Brown's Body." In a war that, counting battles, raids, and skirmishes, would be fought in ten thousand places, Mrs. Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" opened a new and vital front—the quiet pews of Northern churches. Verse by verse she took Lincoln's phrase, "a People's contest," and gave it strength and depth,

rising to a battle-cry that pitted a predominantly Christian nation against every resource of the devil:

In the beauty of the lillies Christ was born  
across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you  
and me;  
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make  
men free,  
While God is marching on.

That same February Edward Lillie Pierce dispatched a unique document of the war to Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury. A native of Massachusetts who had doubtless been tutored in antislavery sentiments by his old friend, Charles Sumner, Pierce was in the islands off the coast of South Carolina for the official purpose, as a special treasury agent, of saving what he could of a crop of 2.5 million pounds of ginned long-staple Sea Island cotton that had fallen into Union hands with the capture of Port Royal. Pierce, however, had possessed an interest far more compelling than his assigned duty, wanting to discover for himself if the Negroes on the islands could be "fitted for useful citizenship"; and now, writing Chase, he bubbled over with the possibilities that his self-appointed social experiment had revealed. Earnestly he pleaded with Chase to send him doctors, nurses, teachers, and social service workers so that he could begin to prepare these island Negroes for freedom; and though Chase could not use treasury funds for any such purpose, he raised no objection to having Pierce carry on his social experiment with voluntary subscriptions. The response was quick and generous; in Boston private citizens organized an Educational Commission, in New York City, a National Freedman's Relief Association, in Philadelphia, a Port Royal Relief Committee.

By June these three groups had seventy-four men and nineteen women hard at work in the islands, with results that exhilarated Pierce: "One teacher on his first day's school, leaves in the room a large alphabet card, and the next day returns to find a mother teaching her little child of three

years to pronounce the first letters of the alphabet she herself learned the day before. The children learn without urging by their parents, and as rapidly as white persons of the same age, often more so, the progress being quickened by the eager desire." Although rejoicing at this evidence of the innate intelligence of the Negro, Pierce confessed that he had encountered many difficulties and harbored numerous honest doubts. In all likelihood Negro adults would lose interest in learning as soon as the novelty wore off; and certainly their children were not easily made quiet and attentive. Moreover, parents at best could exert but a feeble hold over offspring regarded as belonging more to the plantation than the family. At considerable length Pierce spelled out his reservations, and yet time and again his enthusiasm broke through. In an age—and with a government—that could not utter the word emancipation without the qualification of colonization, here was a fresh note, a concept of freedom in a new dimension.

### IV

Gordon dangling from the gallows, Mrs. Howe publishing her verses in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Pierce afire with a social experiment—call them, if you like, simply the happenstances of a single month. Was it also happenstance that sometime during these weeks Lincoln took to wandering over to the telegraph office of the War Department and gazing at the movements of the spiders on the window beyond the desk he had borrowed from Major Eckert? At any rate, slowly, surely, Lincoln found the phrases he was seeking, and after Antietam those phrases would be read around the world. As a document of military necessity, the Emancipation Proclamation, in both its preliminary and final forms, may have been as weak-kneed as the South claimed; but as a tool of psychological warfare, at home and abroad, it performed miracles.

Very likely, even Lincoln did not fully comprehend that he had fashioned an instrument of revolution. Reactions ran the full gamut of emotion, from the Cockney woman who dashed through the streets of London shouting joyously, "Lincoln's been and gone and done it," to Jefferson Davis assuring

the Confederate Congress of his "profound contempt for the impotent rage" the Proclamation disclosed. *Harper's Weekly* tried to take a cheery view of Negro emancipation, although admitting that "a mortal antipathy for the negro is entertained by a large class of persons at the North"; still, the war had brought "a remarkable change in the opinions of educated and liberal men," and since for years the North "had been moving heaven and earth to get more labor from Europe," the editors believed that "the man who tries to frighten the North with threats of competition by emancipated negroes insults the understanding of our laboring class."

The threats continued at a merry pace, nonetheless, for the anti-Lincoln press and the Copperheads never had had it so good. The Conscription Act, making some 3.5 million males between the ages of twenty and forty-five liable to military enrollment, including Indians and Negroes, shook the Thirty-Seventh Congress. "Sunset" Cox of Ohio thundered ominously: "Every man along the border will tell you that the Union is forever rendered hopeless if you pursue this policy of taking slaves from their masters and arming them in this civil strife"; and hardly less pessimistic was the warning of Senator William A. Richardson from Lincoln's home state of the consequences that must ensue if the white race was asked to fight side by side with "an inferior race, the negro."

So began 1863, which with a fine sense of history the editors of *The Atlantic Monthly* called "the year of the Proclamation." Sniped at by Peace Democrat and Copperhead, branded everything from boob to "nigger-lover" for sustaining this new kind of Union, often tormented in mind over whether damaging the Rebel was worth readjusting life-long social values, the fighting Yankee stuck to his guns. He fought under Hooker and Meade at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, under Rosecrans at Chickamauga, and under Grant at Vicksburg and Missionary Ridge—indeed, he never had fought better. He suppressed the Draft Riots in New York City and placed Vallandigham under arrest—indeed, he performed high duty and low with the pride of a veteran who had mastered the craft of war. And when the editors of *The At-*

*lantic Monthly* pondered the "Year of the Proclamation" its history seemed "marvelous" for: "We have been saved 'by the mighty hand of God.' Neither 'malice domestic' nor 'foreign levy' has prevailed at our expense. Whether we had the right to expect Heaven's aid, we cannot undertake to say; but we know that we should not have deserved it, had we continued to link the nation's cause to that of oppression, and had we shed blood and expended gold in order to restore the system of slavery and the sway of slaveholders."

### V

The war was organized now, both as a military force and a political reality, and in both arenas the lines of battle not only were clearly drawn but would become more so. In November at Gettysburg, in dedicating a national cemetery, Lincoln had defined the purpose for which the Yankee fought with such poetic insight that the country would never forget his remarks. Then, in the spring of 1864, Grant came east and Sherman lunged south—the final military pattern of the war had taken shape. And that spring Captain Henry Washington Sawyer of the First New Jersey Cavalry returned home after months as a *cause celebre*. Captured at Brandy Station in 1863 and imprisoned in Richmond, Sawyer had been the first of two Union officers drawn by lot to die in retaliation for the execution by Burnside of two Confederates caught recruiting in Kentucky. The North had moved swiftly to fore-stall this injustice, confining Lee's son Fitzhugh and the son of "the notorious jailer of Libby Prison" in a casemate of Fortress Monroe as hostages, and after a great deal of silly bluster on the part of the Richmond press the Confederate government had abandoned its policy of death for no crime other than having your name on two slips drawn from a box by a prison chaplain. New Jersey had raged and wept over Sawyer, a family man; and when at last he was home, his neighbors presented him with a gold watch and called for a speech. Sawyer responded in a manner that his neighbors perhaps had not expected, confessing that his long hours in Libby had given him time for serious second thoughts upon

the Emancipation Proclamation and the re-election of Mr. Lincoln, and now he realized that both served the national interest.

As the northernmost state that twice repudiated Lincoln at the polls, New Jersey occupied a peculiar position in the emotions of the war. The fact that at its southern tip New Jersey lies forty miles below the Mason and Dixon line was not the answer, either. All parts of the state were good hunting grounds for peace movements and Copperhead agitation, and the halls of the state legislature echoed with the drone of voices reading petitions from communities that found Negro equality a bad bargain for the sacrifices of war. Yet in a military sense, New Jersey stood stanchly by the Union, sending 88,305 troops into the national armies, paying \$2,317,374.75 to discharged soldiers and dependent families, and raising some \$23,000,000 in local bounties. And although the Jerseyan on the home front embraced McClellan (and even would elect him governor in later years), the Jerseyan on the battle-field did not, if one judges by his letters in the press. As an example, consider this extract from a correspondent to *The Ocean Emblem* of Toms River, who insisted that he spoke for 90 per cent of his regiment: "We have examined McClellan as the toper does the oozing of a keg to ascertain its contents, and we pronounce *his* oozing fume as decidedly bad."

The revulsion to Negro equality which had shaken New Jersey had also made strong Copperhead-inspired inroads into Illinois, and yet judging by letters in the Lucian B. Chase Collection of the Chicago Historical Society, the soldier from the Midwest had accepted the war on Lincoln's terms. From camp near Stevenson, Alabama, John H. Souls wrote: "If, by putting negroes in the field, we can save the lives of our white soldiers, I say arm every nigger . . . capable of bearing arms." In Darien, Wisconsin, a friend heard in no uncertain terms from Joseph W. Seaver: ". . . all the patience of all the saints could not endure nor all the charity of the martyrs could cover up the damnable turpitude of the southern rebels nor could all the blood shed, from Abel to the last blast of

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Gabriel's trump wash out the guilt from their black envenomed hearts." As far as the fighting Yankee was concerned, the correspondent for *The Ocean Emblem* summarized well his predominant attitude toward the election of 1864: "... McClellan can hurrah for the prosecution of the war, and Vallandigham can cry peace, peace on any terms; but we will stand by and support the candidates of the Union party, 'Lincoln and Johnson.' "

America's Trojan War, we sometimes call it, but with this difference—the Greeks fought for Helen and an ideal of beauty, and we fought finally for the uneducated African and an ideal of freedom. McClellan, as Lincoln's opponent in 1864, was truly an appropriate symbol of how far the country had come in understanding the function of an army. Like John C. Frémont and David Hunter, but more so than either, McClellan's fundamental weakness had been his inability to recognize the fact that a commanding general must be an instrument of government. One of the few gains that the war would bring the nation was this acceptance of the principle that civilian authority is greater than the military; and one of the torments of McClellan, as a repudiated general turned presidential candidate, was the fact that he must deny the basic planks of his own party. After Sherman's smashing victory at Atlanta, he could not very well call the war a failure; and with the image of the fighting Yankee, who for so long had been a comrade-in-arms searing his mind, he had to admit that "no peace can be permanent without Union."

### VI

When the ballots were counted, Lincoln had won handily. With the President's full influence behind the once-defeated Thirteenth Amendment, this legislation was again brought to a vote on the last day of January, 1865. When the Amendment passed, Congressmen embraced in the aisles of the House, the spectators in the gallery hooted themselves hoarse, and Lincoln, not lacking a phrase, rather thought that this action "winds the whole thing up." As far as any concrete, undeniable achievement of the war was concerned, so it did

—alone of all the problems that had divided the nation in 1861, slavery was stricken from the list when the tragic years of war ended.

For this, truly, the fighting Yankee had become a dogged, skilled practitioner of what British Colonel G. F. R. Henderson called “the grand art of killing one’s fellow man”; he had fashioned armies within his own democratic traditions that were like whole cities on the move; he found images of himself and his generals that were entirely American; and when the bloody business was finished, he wanted only to go home. That he had created new responsibilities that would remain in part unmet a century later he could not foresee, in no small measure because politics (in which too often he was only too eager to take a hand) added to the clean wounds of battle the festering sores of a vindictive peace and a scandalous reconstruction. How dreadfully high comes the price of winning a war and losing the peace the fighting Yankee’s descendants certainly should know. The evidence is everywhere around them.

## HOME LETTERS OF JOHNNY REB AND BILLY YANK

*Bell I. Wiley*

### I

THE CIVIL WAR PROVOKED the greatest flood of letter writing that this country had ever known. About three and a half million men donned the uniform of one side or the other, and this represented a far greater mobilization than any prior American war. Most of the men who joined the Civil War armies wrote letters to their homefolk, and many thousands of these personal documents have been preserved in private possession and in public depositories.

The majority of Civil War soldiers were country folk between the ages of 18 and 30 and only a few of them had traveled far beyond the limits of their neighborhoods. Some of them indicated that the initial letter penned in camp was the first letter that they had ever written.

Travel, contact with strangers, and other new and exciting experiences stimulated rustic soldiers to an unusual degree of expressiveness. George Milledge of the 66th Ohio Regiment wrote his homefolk from a camp in Virginia on June 11, 1863: "if mi sheet was as big as a blanket i could fill it without eny trouble." Another Yank wrote shortly after arriving in camp: "I could talk you all half to death for a whole night if I were with you."

In sharing their novel and wonderful experiences with their homefolk, Rebels and Yanks sometimes drew unfavorable comparisons between the places they visited and their native localities. William B. Gaskins of the First Massachusetts Regiment wrote in his diary on September 20, 1861, after a tour of the nation's capital: "We . . . had a fine view of Washington and the neighborhood, but I was struck with the mean appearance of the city of Washington with the exception of

the Government Buildings there is not a building in the whole city which can be called a good one in comparison with the Stores and dwelling houses of Boston. I had thought that Washington was the finest looking city of or in the country, but it is not." A Georgia soldier, J. M. Dorsey, who was sent to Wilmington, North Carolina, on temporary duty early in 1863, wrote to his wife shortly after arriving at his destination: "This countrie is so por it woulde hardle sprout pees." J. B. Lance, a Tar Heel rustic who went from his native Buncombe County, to the environs of Charleston, South Carolina, wrote after his arrival in South Carolina: "Father I have saw a rite smart of the world Since I left home but I have not Saw any place like Buncombe and Henderson yet."

The Civil War was the first railroad war, and many of the soldiers had their first train ride when they moved from neighborhood training camps to the seat of war. This experience usually was described in some detail. An Ohio soldier, after making the long trip from his home state to Maryland, wrote a friend: "Frank since I seen you last I hav seen the elephant. We started from Urbana [Ohio] at three oclok p.m. we past within 4 mils of Whelling virginia. we past through some of the damdes places ever saw by mortel eyes. We run under som of the dames hills it was dark as the low regeons of hell. We past through one tunel too miles long. . . . As we was passing from tunelton to New Crick the cars run onto a stone that would weigh 500 lbs it was put on the track by rebels it was just whair the track runs close to the river if the engen had not bin so hevy we would have all went to hell in a pile or some other seaport."

The typical common soldier on either side was a man of little education. Hence, most of the letters are poorly written from standpoints of spelling, handwriting, and grammar. Spelling was frequently phonetic. One soldier wrote: "The boys hant used wright we have not drawed a cent of pay yet. . . . we have to take it ruff and tumbel." Shortly after the Army of the Potomac was divided into corps, a Yank wrote to his homefolk: "They are deviding the Army up into

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Corpses." A Yank, disturbed by the prevalence of disease and the frequency of death characteristic of both the Northern and Southern armies during the breaking-in period, wrote his family: "thar is a good meny thar ar Sick thar was one did in the horspitle las nite it is a harde plase." The spelling which he used for hospital was the generally accepted form among the common soldiers on both sides. And they pronounced the word like they spelled it. Soldier correspondents had difficulty spelling the diseases which beset them. A Yank wrote: "John Baker died with the new mornion." Another soldier, without specifying the ailment, stated: "Jim has bin cik."

One of the first things that the Civil War soldiers did after "joining up" was to visit a camp photographer and have their pictures made. Reporting of this experience caused difficulty with spelling. A Confederate soldier wrote his sister: "I will send you my fortograph and I want yourn without fail."

Typical irregularities in spelling and grammar are revealed in an exchange of letters by a Georgia soldier, Peter Dekle, and his wife. On June 8, 1862, he wrote her from camp near Savannah: "My dear and loving wife, I this evening seated my self to answer your most Kine and affectionated letter which I received this after Knoon. . . . I am sorry to here you were sick and about to loose your teeth you must take good care of your teeth and not loose them as they are a great peace of property to any one you must take a brush and clean them three or four times a day . . . I would hate to go home and find you without any teeth."

Mrs. Dekle wrote back that she would like to visit her husband in camp. This alarmed him exceedingly and he immediately wrote in reply: "I would not have you in camps for nothing if you were here I would kill some one in two hours all meenness you can think of are in camps and black guard so they are no use for you here . . . it are no place for a nice woman, at least, to be at they are several women in camps at this time, go on like the men, sleepe in the tents like another boy croud in where they are thre or four and

sleep sum of the Boys naked sum one way and sum another if you think stand such I have nothing more to say." It is little wonder that Mrs. Dekle, on receipt of this letter, decided against going to see her spouse.

## II

The letters of the common soldiers are rich in humor. Indeed, no richer humor is to be found in the whole of American literature than in the letters of the semi-literate men who wore the blue and the gray. Some of their figures of speech were colorful and expressive. A Confederate observed that the Yankees were: "thicker than lise on a hen and a dam site ornraier." Another reported that his comrades were "in fine spirits pitching around like a blind dog in a meat house." A third wrote that it was "raining like poring peas on a raw-hide."

Yanks were equally adept at figurative expression. One wrote: "[I am so hungry] I could eat a rider off his horse & snap at the stirups." A second reported that the dilapidated houses in Virginia "look like the latter end of original sin and hard times." A third remarked of slowness of Southerners: "They moved about from corner to corner, as uneasy as a litter of hungry leaches on the neck of a wooden god." Still another, annoyed by the brevity of a recently received missive, wrote: "Yore letter was short and sweet, jist like a roasted maget." A Yankee sergeant gave the following description of his sweetheart: "My girl is none of your one-horse girls. She is a regular stub and twister, double geered. . . . She is well-educated and refined, all wildcat and fur, and Union from the muzzle to the crupper."

Humor found many modes of expression. A Texan wrote to a male companion at home: "What has become of Halda and Laura? . . . When you see them again give them my love—not best respects now, but love by God." William R. Stillwell, an admirable Georgian whose delightful correspondence is preserved in the Georgia Department of Archives and History, liked to tease his wife in his letters. After he had been away from home about a year he wrote: "[Dear Wife]

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If I did not write and receive letters from you I believe that I would forgit that I was married I don't feel much like a maryed man but I never forgit it sofar as to court enny other lady but if I should you must forgive me as I am so forgitful." A Yank, disturbed by his increasing corpulence, wrote: "I am growing so fat . . . I am a burden 2 myself." Another Yank parodied the familiar bedtime prayer:

Now I lay me down to sleep,  
The gray-backs o'er my body creep;  
If they should bite before I wake,  
I pray the Lord their jaws to break."

Charles Thiot, a splendid Georgia soldier, differed from most of his comrades in the ranks in that he was the owner of a large plantation, well-educated, and nearly fifty years of age. But he was very much like his associates in his hatred of camp routine. Near the end of his service he wrote that when the war was over he was going to buy two pups, name one of them "fall-in" and the other "close-up," and then shoot them both, "and that will be the end of 'fall-in' and 'close-up'."

The soldiers who comprised the rank and file of the Civil War armies were an earthy people. They talked and wrote much about the elemental functions of the body. One of the most common of camp maladies was diarrhoea. Men of more delicate sensibilities referred to this condition as "looseness of the bowels"; but a much more common designation was "the sh-ts". A Michigan soldier stationed in Georgia wrote in 1864: "I expect to be tough as a knott as soon as I get over the Georgia Shitts." Johnny Rebs from the deep South who were plagued with diarrhoea after transfer to the Virginia front often informed their families that they were suffering from "the Virginia quickstep."

A Georgia soldier gave his wife the following description of the cause and consequence of diarrhoea: "I have bin a little sick with diorah two or three days. . . . I eat too much eggs and poark it sowered [on] my stomach and turn loose on me." A Michigan soldier wrote his brother: "I am well at present with the exception I have got the Dyerear and I hope thease few lines find you the same."

The letters which poured forth from camps were usually written under adverse circumstances. Save for brief periods in garrison or winter quarters, soldiers rarely enjoyed the luxury of a writing desk or table. Most of the letters were written in the hubbub of camp, on stumps, pieces of bark, drum heads, or the knee. In the South, after the first year of the war, paper and ink were very poor. Scarcity of paper caused many Southerners to adopt the practice of cross-writing, i. e., after writing from left to right of the page in the usual manner, they gave the sheet a half turn and wrote from end to end across the lines previously written. Sometimes soldiers wrote letters while bullets were whizzing about their heads. A Yank writing from Vicksburg, May 28, 1863, stated: "Not less than 50 balls have passed over me since I commenced writing. . . . I could tell you of plenty narrow escapes, but we take no notice of them now." A Reb stationed near Petersburg informed his mother: "I need not tell you that I dodge pretty often . . . for you can see that very plainly by the blots in this letter. Just count each blot a dodge and add in a few for I don't dodge every time." Another Reb writing under similar circumstances before Atlanta reported: "The Yankees keep Shooting so I am afraid they will knock over my ink, so I will close."

## III

The most common type of letter was that of soldier husbands to their wives. But fathers often addressed communications to their small children; and these, full of homely advice, are among the most human and revealing of Civil War letters. Rebs who owned slaves occasionally would include in their letters admonitions or greetings to members of the Negro community. Occasionally they would write to the slaves. Early in the war it was not uncommon for planters' sons to retain in camp Negro "body servants" to perform the menial chores such as cooking, foraging, cleaning the quarters, shining shoes, and laundering clothes. Sometimes these servants wrote or dictated for enclosure with the letters of their

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soldier-masters messages to their relatives and to members of their owners' families.

Unmarried soldiers carried on correspondence with sweethearts at home. Owing to the restrained usages characteristic of 19th-century America, these letters usually were stereotyped and revealed little depth of feeling.

Occasionally gay young blades would write vividly to boon companions at home about their amorous exploits in Richmond, Petersburg, Washington, or Nashville. But these comments are hardly printable. An Alabama soldier whose feminine associations were of the more admirable type wrote boastfully of his achievements among the Virginia belles: "They thout I was a saint. I told them some sweet lies and they believed it all . . . I would tell them I got a letter from home stating that five of my Negroes had runaway and ten of Pappies But I wold say I recond he did not mind it for he had a plenty more left and then they would lean to me like a sore eyd kitten to a basin of milk."

Some of the letters were pungently expressive. An Ohio soldier who, from a comrade just returned from leave, received an unfavorable comment on the conduct of his sister, took pen in hand and delivered himself thus: "[Dear Sis] Alf sed he heard that you and hardy was a runing together all the time and he though he wod gust quit having any thing mor to doo with you for he thought it was no more yuse. . . . I think you made a dam good chouise to turn off as nise a fele as Alf dyer and let that orney thefin, drunkard, damed card playing Sun of a bich com to Sea you, the god damed theaf and lop yeard pigeon tode helion, he is too orney for hel. . . . i will Shute him as shore as i Sea him."

Initiation into combat sometimes elicited from soldier correspondents choice comments about their experiences and reactions. A Federal infantryman wrote to his father shortly after his first skirmish in Virginia: "Dear Pa. . . . Went out a Skouting yesterday. We got to one house where there were five secessionist they brok & run and Arch holored out to shoot the ornery suns of biches and we all let go at them. Thay may say what they please but godamit Pa it is fun."

Some of the choicest remarks made by soldiers in their letters were in disparagement of unpopular officers. A Mississippi soldier wrote: "Our General Reub Davis . . . is a vain, stuck-up, illiterate ass." An Alabamian wrote: "Col. Henry is [an ignoramus] fit for nothing higher than the cultivation of corn." A Floridian stated that his officers were "not fit to tote guts to a bear." On December 9, 1862, Sergeant Edwin H. Fay, an unusual Louisianian who held A.B. and M.A. degrees from Harvard University and who before the war was headmaster of a private school for boys in Louisiana, wrote his wife: "I saw Pemberton and he is the most insignificant puke I ever saw. . . . His head cannot contain enough sense to command a regiment, much less a corps. . . . Jackson . . . runs first and his Cavalry are well drilled to follow their leader. He is not worth shucks. But he is a West Point graduate and therefore must be born to command."

Similar comments about officers are to be found in the letters of Northern soldiers. A Massachusetts soldier, who seems to have been a Civil War version of Bill Mauldin, wrote: "The officers consider themselves as made of a different material from the low fellows in the ranks. . . . They get all the glory and most of the pay and don't earn ten cents apiece on the average, the drunken rascals." Private George Gray Hunter of Pennsylvania wrote: "I am well convinced in My own Mind that had it not been for officers this war would have ended long ago." Another Yankee became so disgusted as to state: "I wish to God one half of our officers were knocked in the head by slinging them against [the other half]."

No group of officers came in for more spirited denunciation than the doctors. One Federal soldier wrote: "The doctors is no a conte . . . hell will be filde with do[c]ters and offersey when this war is over." Shortly after the beginning of Sherman's Georgia campaign, an ailing Yank wrote his homefolk: "The surgeon insisted on sending me to the hospital for treatment. I insisted on takeing the field and prevailed—thinking that I had better die by rebel bullets than [by] Union quackery."

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The attitudes which the Rebs and Yanks took toward each other were very much the same and ranged over the same gamut of feeling, from friendliness to extreme hatred. The Rebs were, to a Massachusetts corporal, "fighting madmen or not men at all but whiskey & gunpowder put into a human frame." A Pennsylvania soldier wrote that "they were the hardest looking set of men that Ever i saw they Looked as if they had been fed on vinegar and shavings. . . ." Private Jenkins Lloyd Jones of the Wisconsin Light Artillery wrote in his diary: "I strolled among the Alabamans on the right . . . found some of the greenest specimens of humanity I think in the universe their ignorance being little less than the slave they despise with as imperfect a dialect 'They Recooned as how you'uns all would be a heap wus to we'uns all'." In a similar vein, but writing from the opposite side, Thomas Taylor, a private in the 6th Alabama Volunteers, in a letter to his wife, stated: "You know that my heart is with you but I never could have been satisfied to have staid at home when my country is invaded by a thievin foe By a set of cowardly Skunks whose Motto is Booty. . . . No No let me undergo the toils the privations & self denials of a Soldiers life & then return to my family to live in peace and pleasure." Another private, from Virginia, asked in wonder: "Will god answer the prayers of such a people when offered in behalf of such a war." And a Mississippi private writes to his mother: "It is my Honest wish that my Rifle may Draw tears from Many a Northern Mother and Sighs from Many a father before this thing is over yet."

Yet the men did talk with each other across the picket lines, and even fraternized with each other. Jerome Yates, a private in a Mississippi regiment, wrote to his sister: "some where the lines are as Near as 200 yds in some places in our front they are 2000 yards apart they are on one side of a field and we are on the other we go on pickett every 7th day when we stand pickett our Skirmishers are in 150 yds of their line of Battle and 100 yds from their Sharpshooters fireing has been agreed to by parties as a useless waste of Ammunition and we boldly shout and look each other in the face from day light

until night and then listen for each other to advance we read Each others papers in 15 minutes after the news Boys Bring them from the Office the Boys deal Considerable with them for various little articles such as Coffee Knives Pipes writing Paper and Envelopes." And, from the other side, in a letter to his mother, Private Edward Louis Edes of the 33rd Massachusetts Regiment, wrote: "Our pickets are on one bank of a creek and the rebel pickets on the other. And for a long time, since we agreed not to shoot at each other we have gone down the bank and talked and traded with them a great deal. . . ."

If they hated each other, both Reb and Yank could yet recognize each other's courage. On hearing of Stonewall Jackson's death, a Wisconsin sergeant wrote: "Rebel though he was, he was gallant and manly, and was admired, by every one that ever had anything to do with him, for his noble qualities. He was one of those many instances recorded in the worlds history, of a good man, being deceived into lending himself to a bad cause." Captain Charles E. Willis of the 103rd Illinois Infantry recorded in his diary: "I was never so affected by the Sight of dead & wounded before. Old gray haired weakly looking men and little boys certainly not over 15 yrs. old lay dead or writhing in pain. I did pity those poor boys. They almost all who could talk said that the rebel cavalry gathered them up & forced them in. We took all inside our skirmish line that could bear moving to our hospital & covered the rest with the blankets of the dead. I hope we will never have to shoot at such men again." "Dashing, brave, impetuous, but doomed to destruction"—so a Union soldier wrote of the enemy at Chancellorsville.

IV

The letters of Johnny Rebs and Billy Yanks are fascinating social documents. They are especially valuable for the light which they throw on the character of the plain people of a century ago. These letters show, for example, that most of the lowly people were ambitious for their children. However lacking they themselves might be in culture, they wanted

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their children to have an opportunity to rise in the social scale and to become honorable, useful citizens. To their wives the lowly soldiers wrote: whatever happens to me, be sure to keep the children in school. A favorite message to their children was: be good, mind your mother, don't neglect your books. This advice reflected the most earnest longing of these humble fathers for their sons and daughters.

The letters also reveal that the humble folk were people of integrity. It is not meant to suggest, of course, that all were admirable, for both the Northern and the Southern armies had their quotas of shirkers, cowards, and knaves. But for the most part, Johnny Rebs and Billy Yanks were respectable men. Their worth is suggested by the notable recurrence in their letters of such words as honor and duty.

In the third place, the common soldiers were men of courage. Time after time they marched into a hell of fire and lead without flinching. Even more staunch and more courageous were the lowly wives and mothers at home who held their families together during the absence of their men folk, plowed the fields, harvested the crops, cut and hauled the fire wood, nursed the sick, buried the dead, endured the gnawing anxiety about soldier husbands or sons, and had the stamina and moral strength to write cheering letters. A Virginia woman, who by her resourcefulness and toil was able to sustain several children, wrote her soldier husband on November 20, 1864: "donte be uneasy about us. We will try and take care of [our]selves the best we can. I donte mind what I have to do [just] so you can get back safe." A stalwart Georgia woman whose soldier husband had written that he could not send her any money, owing to failure to receive his pay, replied: "John don't disfurnish your self to send me mony for I will make out som way. . . . I hope you will chire up and not study [i.e., worry] too much for it onle mak bad wors. . . . Dont be onese about me." Her response is the more magnificent in view of the fact that she had recently been forced to sell home and small farm and was having enormous difficulty in supporting herself and her baby.

The common soldiers and their folk at home were people

of generosity. Rebs and Yanks, living often on reduced rations, did not hesitate to share their meager provisions with comrades more needy than themselves. And the letters and diaries of soldiers and civilians traveling through the South during the Civil War indicate that when they needed a meal or shelter they could almost always find hospitality in the homes of the yeomen. The same cannot be said of the reception accorded by the more privileged classes.

In sum, the letters of Johnny Reb and Billy Yank indicate that the common people, both North and South, were the bedrock of their respective causes. Their conduct during the momentous crisis of the American Civil War reflected great credit on them and their class, and justified the faith reposed in them by their dedicated champion and leader, Thomas Jefferson.

One of the persons who recognized the solid worth of the common folk while the war was still in progress was A. T. Davidson, a member of the Confederate Congress from North Carolina. On March 4, 1863, Davidson wrote his brother, a lieutenant in the Confederate army: "This revolution has brought to the surface no great looking heroes but thousands and tens of thousands of heroes in the ranks and the country in coming years will be bound to acknowledge it."

## R. J. HINTON: LINCOLN'S RELUCTANT BIOGRAPHER<sup>1</sup>

*C. Carroll Hollis*

JUST OVER A CENTURY AGO, Lincoln was nominated for the presidency. The lanky figure from the prairie west ultimately became the most talked of and written about figure in American politics, but in May 1860 he was virtually unknown. Harried reporters emptied the "morgue" of every scrap of information for their curious public, but the campaign needed, then as always, larger and more flamboyant treatment. Accordingly, it was inevitable that there would be a flurry of biographies and that none of them would have much value beyond their immediate purpose as campaign literature.

Nevertheless, the first in any category has always received extra attention by the very fact of its numerical priority. By its cardinal importance alone, the first biography or novel or drama will usurp the attention that might go to some second, third, or seventh more truly dramatic production. Similarly, for the past thirty years, that is, since William Barton's notable summary of available evidence in the *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society* in 1929, Lincoln scholars have accepted as first the anonymous biography published by the Boston firm of Thayer & Eldridge, *Life and Public Services of Hon. Abraham Lincoln of Illinois and Hon. Hannibal Hamlin of Maine*. It was the first of some half dozen biographies published within a month of the nomination. Ernest Wessen, in *Papers in Illinois History and Transactions for*

<sup>1</sup> In Detroit there are three remarkable collections to which scholars are indebted: the Burton Historical Library, the Whitman Collection of Mr. Charles Feinberg, and the Lincoln Collection of the late Rev. Edgar Dewitt Jones. I am indebted not to any one of these separately but to all three equally, with a grateful assist to the Kansas State Historical Society and its microfilm service. It is pleasant to acknowledge here that the re-discovery of Richard Hinton is due to that serendipity of proximation by which from one of these collections some stray bit of information much too minor to be noted and filed was nevertheless still in mind when a neighboring piece of the puzzle appeared in another collection and so permitted the necessary associations.

*the Year 1937*, has wished to re-arrange this calendar hierarchy by a few days, but consensus had already given the crown.

Still, an anonymous *first* upsets historical decorum, and no one can be pleased that America's most biographed figure received his earliest tribute from an unknown. Indeed the vexation of not having a name for Thayer & Eldridge's writer has been an annoyance to bibliographers long enough. His name is Richard J. Hinton.

Yet even the name means nothing, for he is not in *D.A.B.*, nor in any of the standard reference works in our libraries. In our compartmentalizing of the past, we have left no pigeon holes for journalists like Hinton, and thus miss much of the relationship between literature, politics, social theory, and high adventure that such a career exhibits. By the very nature of his profession, the journalist is apt to be anonymous. Even his by-line means more to other journalists than to the reader. And by the time a half century has passed, his name may not even trigger the historian's curiosity. Some such fate has befallen Richard Josiah Hinton, not only Lincoln's first biographer but one of the strangest figures of the forgotten past.

## I

This is not the place to explain all I have discovered about Hinton, but I would like to summarize his career both before and after the Lincoln biography as well as to explain his activities at the time of Lincoln's nomination. He was born of Cockney parents in London on November 25, 1830. His father, a stonemason by trade, had been Lord Elgin's chief workman in preparing the famous archaeology exhibit at the British Museum. Perhaps his craft was thus indirectly responsible for Keats' sonnet "On the Elgin Marbles" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." But the senior Hinton was less interested in aesthetic than in pecuniary compensation for his labors, and became a labor agitator and trades union president in the 1830's.

Hinton once told a Congressional Investigating Committee that his father would have been deported had the union

activity been discovered, and doubtless the lifelong distrust of vested authority began in his youth when his father set him to watch for snooping strangers while nightly meetings were held in their home. Young Hinton was himself apprenticed to a stone mason but also found time to learn printing and shorthand at a mechanics institute. At this time in England labor agitations were definitely revolutionary in character, and by the time he was eighteen he was a confirmed Chartist. The Chartists were divided into the "moral force" members, who hoped to win friends in Parliament by appeals to that august body's corporate conscience, and the "physical force" extremists, whose intended methods of influencing Parliament were less abstract. Hinton was one of these extremists, and with the failure of the movement through the blundering leadership of Feargus O'Connor, he left England to avoid arrest.

He arrived in New York in 1851, studied topographical engineering at what became the Columbia School of Mines, and sufficiently perfected his shorthand skill to get employment as newspaper reporter. In 1854 he made his first visit to Boston. As a young radical in England, he had read all the accounts he could find about the Boston Massacre, the Tea Party, and Bunker Hill, and now he spent the first day in visiting historical sites. On the next day he went to report the protest rally organized by Theodore Parker to decry the fugitive slave law by which Anthony Burns was then imprisoned. Here, as always hereafter in Hinton's career, to report on a liberal cause was to join it, and that evening, with Martin Stowell, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and other young radicals, he raided the jail in an unsuccessful attempt to rescue Burns.

Back in New York in 1855, he was working for the *Knickerbocker Magazine* and met Walt Whitman, who came to the office to leave a review copy of *Leaves of Grass*. Later in the year he made friends with another poet, the self-styled genius Richard Realf, an Englishman in America who is almost as forgotten as Hinton and of whose troubled existence Hinton became the only chronicler. But in January of 1856, he was

back again in Boston to become the disciple of Wendell Phillips, under whose tutelage the intellectual foundations for his radical career were set and cemented. Both men were impassioned abolitionists who believed the slave could be freed only by war, and most of Hinton's activities for the next decade are consequences of this conviction.

In May, with the "sack of Lawrence" by the Border Ruffians, it seemed that the civil war in "bleeding Kansas" might spread to the nation, so in June Hinton went to the Territory officially as correspondent of the Boston *Traveler* but actually to hasten the war that others were trying to delay. He was part of a band led by Stowell and Higginson to take arms and munitions to the free state settlers, and when this group was delayed for a day in Chicago, he visited the offices of the Chicago *Tribune* and made arrangements to be its correspondent also. The intention was to so report news as to make every crisis of help in electing Fremont (whom Hinton met on his way to Kansas), but time was too short.

As the company neared Kansas, Hinton was overwhelmed by the enormity of the prairie with its suggestions of limitless social and spiritual as well as physical expansion. He had prepared himself for the Kansas adventure quite as though he were on the way to martyrdom. In his diary he had written: "Kansas is the word, and the over ruling Father of Love alone knows what will be my fate there. One thing I do know, and that is I shall not shrink from my duty, be it what it may." By American standards the comment may seem pretentious, but Hinton was young, English, and full of high seriousness. Human nature does not change noticeably in a century, and I find it easier to understand the John Brown radicals (as Hinton, Kagi, Realf, Redpath, Swinton) by thinking of them and their period in terms of a nearer parallel, the Spanish war of eighty years later.

Both were skirmishes for a bigger war four years later; both drew intellectuals, writers, adventurers. The Lincoln Brigades of Kansas were made up of the same amateur soldiers, poets, college students on a lark, zealots, and dreamers. There was the same common cause against the enemy and bitter differ-

ences among themselves. There was the shocked surprise that many of the natives they came to help were indifferent to the cause. The war itself was important, but the ideological war it signified was more so. Many were loyal to the party line before they knew what that line was, and when they found it they shrugged acceptance, or bolted, or worked out a less radical compromise, or accepted it altogether. From what I know of the Kansas radicals, I believe that of all of them, Hinton comes nearest to accepting the radical implications of 19th-century social thought as far as he knew them.

By the time he reached Kansas, the crisis had passed, but he remained anyway, working on various newspapers, fighting the growth of moderation and conservatism in the Free State party, reporting on local events for the eastern dailies in such a way as to keep the home fires of indignation burning. With his newspaper friends James Redpath, John Henry Kagi, William A. Phillips, and others, he built John Brown into the myth figure that reached its climax at Harper's Ferry.

Hinton would have joined Brown, as did Kagi and Richard Realf, but he had contracted with Redpath as co-author to write a guide-book to Kansas and Colorado (where gold had just been discovered), and was obligated to visit the Pike's Peak region. During this time, too, he was working desperately to organize the Republican party in Kansas and to give it the radical orientation he thought necessary. Were it not for these responsibilities, he would have been with Brown at Harper's Ferry, for he had no physical fear, had worked with Brown a number of times, was genuinely fond of Kagi (Brown's right hand man) and Realf (who later defected and turned state's evidence).

The last time he saw Brown was three days before the attack on Harper's Ferry. At a secret meeting at Hagerstown he brought word from the Boston supporters, but whether it was an ultimatum or a recommendation for withdrawal or delay is not reported. Hinton left immediately for Kansas and arrived in Leavenworth just as news of the raid was coming in.

At first he was tremendously excited, but with word of the collapse of the fantastic venture he refused to talk further and

left immediately for Boston. There he helped his friend James Redpath write the first and best known of the John Brown books for the just established publishing firm of Thayer & Eldridge. But most of his time went to a scheme almost as bizarre as the Harper's Ferry plot. This was the attempt to raid the jail where Brown was imprisoned awaiting execution. Brown himself finally heard of the plan and forbade it, but after his death the plan was continued to rescue Brown's men, Hazlitt and Stevens, awaiting execution for March, 1860. Hinton may well have felt a peculiar interest in rescuing young Stevens, for the youth was charged as conspirator under the alias that Hinton had been using in his abolition activities.

The attempt to free Brown's men came nearer to being tried than the earlier plan. Money for the venture came from the profits of Redpath's biography of Brown, and Hinton went back to Kansas (under an alias, for his arrest was sought) to obtain the services of Captain Montgomery and his band of jayhawks, a group that might almost be called professionals at the quick daring raid. From lower Pennsylvania where they were hiding in the mountains, one of these raiders went to Charlestown, faked a drunken spree, and was successful in getting locked up in the same jail as Hazlitt and Stevens to whom he reported the plot. Another managed to get a post as one of the relief guards at the jail. The fantastic scheme might have been tried but for weather conditions; it was finally given up in January, 1860, only because Montgomery withdrew, not Hinton.

After Brown had been hanged on December 2, 1859, his body was taken to the family farm at North Elba, N. Y., for burial. As the casket came through New York, Hinton asked that it be opened, and as he and John Swinton (a Kansas friend of his and also a friend of Whitman) gazed on the bearded face of the man they considered a martyr, both men were struck by a resemblance they noticed to Whitman. Perhaps this association, plus Swinton's urging, was enough to re-kindle Hinton's enthusiasm for *Leaves of Grass*, but whatever the circumstances, he convinced Thayer & Eldridge that

as publishers and promoters of radical causes they should include radical poetry along with politics in their program. It was a great service to Whitman, for this young energetic firm would become his first real publishers, and the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* is in every way the triumphal book of Whitman's early career.

During the winter and early spring, James Redpath was in hiding while writing the John Brown biography and its sequel, *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*. Redpath's seclusion was not occasioned by any need to have lonely communion with his muse, but to escape from a subpoena sworn out for him by a Senate committee headed by Jefferson Davis to investigate the Harper's Ferry plot. Redpath spent these months at his brother's farm near Kalamazoo, Michigan; another of the accused, John Brown, Jr., was hidden by friends in Ohio; and F. B. Sanborn, also demanded by the committee, went to Canada. By April, Sanborn apparently thought the pressure was off and came back to Concord, where he was promptly arrested and taken to Boston en route to Washington, D. C.

In the sudden flurry of excitement attendant on this arrest, Hinton took a leading part. He was a member of the League of Freedom, a group of young radicals, many of them from the German turner groups and led at this time by Karl Heinen, editor of the radical paper *Der Pionier*. An admittedly flimsy writ of habeas corpus was hastily prepared to free Sanborn, and on April 4, Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw was to pass on its legality. Shaw was no dewy eyed abolitionist and no one could predict what his reaction might be. Accordingly, Hinton arranged to have the League of Freedom in the court room, all armed and in the front row, and to have as many prominent and respectable citizens there as well, perhaps as a cover for the planned rush on the bench and the prisoner's box should the decision be unfavorable. He himself brought Wendell Phillips and Walt Whitman, but of the three I think Hinton the only one who would have jumped forward to seize Sanborn and shoot down the guard had the occasion arisen. But Shaw supported the writ, and Sanborn walked out amid bravos, with Hinton leading the cheers.

## II

Such was Richard Josiah Hinton, author of the first Lincoln biography.

There never has been any doubt that he wrote it, and also one of William Seward, for he said as much himself on three occasions that I have found, and three contemporaries have included mention of them in their references to him. The point is that in 1860, Hinton's reputation was such that any biographies by him had to be anonymous. The Republicans were loudly disavowing any connection with Harper's Ferry, and for the candidate's biographer to be a John Brown radical would have been disastrous. When his authorship was acknowledged decades later, no one knew his biography was first, and by the time that fact was known, he had long before slipped out of the historian's dragnet into the unremembered past.

His own references to the biography are casual and off-hand, quite as though it were a professional chore like that of William Dean Howells for an Ohio publisher some weeks later. Hinton's attitude to the book is, indeed, the proper one, but the attention given to it by its priority makes necessary some notice of its contents and the circumstances of its publication. The book went through three editions, of which the first and third are most important. In an attempt to humanize Lincoln, the *Chicago Tribune* in a widely circulated story had told of the sheriff's seizing of the youthful Lincoln's surveying outfit because he had not kept up his installments. Hinton used the story, but someone higher up (perhaps Greeley) thought the anecdote improper for campaign purposes. Accordingly it was dropped in the second edition. But the third edition restored the anecdote, or, to be more exact, this book (which has *Wide-Awake Edition* printed on the cover and hence is known by this title) added 180 extra pages of Lincoln's speeches to the first edition and bound the whole in stiff covers.

The book was announced as in the press on May 19, a day after the convention. It was registered for copyright on

## LINCOLN'S RELUCTANT BIOGRAPHER

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May 28, which was four days ahead of its nearest competitor, and according to Barton was advertised as "now ready" and "was actually sold on Monday, May 28, 1860." Wessen thinks the copyright registering was a maneuver of Thayer & Eldridge to protect themselves "while the book was in the process of production," although what they were protecting themselves from is not clear. Unless it can be shown that Barton's evidence is wrong, it seems proper to accept his unidentified quotation as correct and to agree with him that "it was certainly first to secure copyright and so far as I can discover it was first on the market."

It was quite successful, for two weeks later the publishers boasted of having sold 10,000, although this triumph was occasioned more by the price (25¢) and the public curiosity than by the brilliance of the work. It may not have been entirely perfunctory, but like most other campaign biographies, it is eminently undistinguished. Most of the material was obtained from the Chicago *Tribune* columns, although Wessen admits the author "quoted from a number of newspaper stories and indulged in at least some original research," which is more than the other early biographers did. In particular, Hinton inserted a section quoting the abolition demands of an Illinois Republican meeting of 1854, implying that these were official party resolutions to which Lincoln had given his approval. This was a mistake, and when it appeared again in Howells' book (who seems to have taken it from the same source as Hinton or more probably from Hinton) Lincoln marked the correction in the margin in the famous copy that has made Howells' book so independently significant. The point about the inclusion of the abolition material in Hinton's book is to make Lincoln a stronger abolitionist than he was, for the epithet "a trimmer" had already been applied and had to be outweighed to garner Northern antislave votes.

There are a few other indications that the book may have had a few more subtle motivations than are apparent at first glance, but in general the undistinguished style shows that the author was writing because he had to say something

rather than because he had something to say. In fact, it seems fairly clear that this first Lincoln biography was written by a man who was not a Lincoln enthusiast at all. If this seems heinous, it is only because through the myth figure we have created of Lincoln we find it hard to imagine that anyone could be indifferent to him without being a copperhead. The truth is that radical abolitionists of Hinton's sort had already picked their candidate before the convention, William H. Seward. Since Seward did not get nominated, Hinton wanted Lincoln elected over Douglas and wrote to that end, but he clearly had not planned it that way.

And indeed there is a joker here, for it happened that the abolitionists were so confident of Seward's nomination that Hinton had written his campaign biography of him before the convention. All that was needed were a few pages at the end for the Vice-President (who turned out to be Hamlin of Maine, for whom Hinton did work out the pages still found in the Lincoln book). Consequently, when the startling news arrived that Lincoln was nominated, the Seward book was too far advanced to stop and appeared with these odd opening sentences:

Among the foremost names on the political roll stands pre-eminent that of William H. Seward. The representative men of the Republican party, the hopes of the moderate, peace-loving people of the Free States have centered upon him, and deep-seated lies the determination of the army of northern free-men to make him next President.

The Seward biography has been of little interest heretofore except as a "jumping the gun" venture by a minor Boston publisher, one of a number of speculative risks that led to the firm's bankruptcy within the year. But this earliest of the Hinton campaign books is much superior to the perfunctory, albeit first, Lincoln biography that followed it in a few days at the Thayer & Eldridge press. The Seward book is written with a great deal of care, is based on considerable research, takes a vigorous stand on Seward's antislave record and on such forgotten matters as the anti-rent troubles of decades earlier. Indeed, this biography, signed with considerable

sagacity as by "A Jefferson Republican," is obviously the book Hinton intended to be the first biography of the first Republican president.

### III

If all this seems a dramatic beginning for Lincoln's first biographer, his career after the biography is quite as spectacular. On July 4, 1860, he arranged a celebration at the grave of John Brown in North Elba, N. Y. This event was more widely publicized than attended, but for the radical cause it was the publicity that was wanted. Hinton had arranged for material from Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, and Henry David Thoreau, and since they could not attend he read their addresses to the small gathering. One would like a tape of his rendition of these speeches, for " 'Inton of H-old H-england"—as his enemies were accustomed to jeer—was a citizen in everything but his speech.

In the fall of the year, he went to Washington as reporter for a Boston daily and as correspondent of the *Anti-Slavery Standard*. He remained there through the campaign and the election to report reactions and to publicize the radical demands of the abolitionists. Just after the attack on Fort Sumter, he returned briefly to Boston and joined the League of Freedom in guarding Phillips from threatened assassination at the famous Music Hall speech. That speech ended with a bold cry that must have found its echo in Hinton's heart: "to make the welcome I give to this war hearty and hot!" When Hinton had gone to Kansas five years before, Phillips had met him on the way to the station and had asked him what he hoped to accomplish there. Hinton had answered that he hoped Kansas would be the road to South Carolina. Now, at the end of his bold speech of April 21, 1861, while the hall rang with applause, Phillips leaned down from the platform to cry in Hinton's ear, "Well, Hinton, we've reached South Carolina at last!"

Hinton was, in fact, much too radical to be long content with Lincoln's moderate pace. He apparently went on one secret service mission in the South where, by posing as a sym-

pathetic English traveler, he was able to get close to fortifications and to sketch harbor defenses. He is supposed to have received Lincoln's personal thanks for this service, but I have been unable to discover any official notice of the mission or the handshake. In fact, the radicals seemed far more concerned with their cause than with the preservation of the union, and they were soon accusing Lincoln of dilatory tactics, of lack of firmness, of reneging on the abolition promises by which they claimed his election had been won. Friends of Hinton, such as Count Gurowski, were violent in their accusations and in their demands for immediate emancipation and for the use of colored troops. Hinton himself feared the abolition crusade had come to a standstill and went back to Kansas.

There the new state was in the throes of a financial scandal. Three of the state officers, including Governor Robinson, hero of the bleeding Kansas period, were to be impeached for irregularities in the sale of state bonds. Hinton's friend Preston Plumb began the career that was to bring him to the U. S. Senate by directing the Kansas trials. Hinton spent the spring and summer of 1862 as the official reporter and ultimately as the author of the *Impeachment Trials*, a 472-page volume which by hearsay is "a rare and valuable work."

But what Hinton wanted early in the war was finally granted, perhaps through the intercession of Jim Lane, whom he had supported in the bleeding Kansas period and who was now U. S. Senator and Lincoln's close friend and advisor. This eagerly sought position, which Hinton always boasted of in later years, was as adjutant in the Federal forces with the function of being the first officer detailed to enlist colored soldiers. He went to Washington to receive his commission and instructions, and for some reason that I cannot determine, was at Antietam on that disastrous September afternoon. He may have gone there in his other role as correspondent, but whatever the occasion, he was wounded in the leg and hospitalized. In the closing days of the year, in one of the wards where he was convalescing, he again met Whitman, who was just then beginning the dedication to the wounded which

Hinton himself celebrated in a story for a Cincinnati paper.

Out of the hospital, he returned to Kansas to answer the muster of the First Regiment Kansas Colored Volunteers. He served for the rest of the war, taking an active part in defending Kansas against the rebel invasion of General Sterling Price, and later writing his account of this part of the war in the west in one of the most neglected Civil War accounts, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas*. He was well aware that the great eastern dailies, in their emphasis on the Army of the Potomac, were slighting the important happenings beyond the Mississippi. His friend John Swinton was now managing editor of the *New York Times*, and through his intercession with Henry Raymond, the owner, the paper published Hinton's letters, the only first-hand accounts of the war in the west available to eastern readers.

In 1865, Hinton, now a Captain of the Second Kansas Colored Volunteers, went to Arkansas where he remained for the final months of the war, probably on police duty. After Appomattox he remained with the Army of Occupation in Tennessee, having been promoted to Colonel but acting as inspector general of the Freedmen's Bureau. He wrote a brief account of his observations and recommendations for the *Nation*, but by the end of the year was a civilian again. He immediately went to Boston to re-dedicate himself to Wendell Phillips and the radical program, but he found it difficult to do so. These were trying days for radical abolitionists for, habituated to fighting for a cause, there was now no dramatic theme around which they could direct their zeal.

Phillips gave Hinton letters of introduction to Senators Wilson and Sumner, and in particular to Thaddeus Stevens, and outlined for him the radical program for reconstruction that was to lead ultimately to the attempt to impeach Andrew Johnson. Back in Washington, Hinton was correspondent for a number of dailies, but his still remaining abolition energies were channeled through the *Anti-Slavery Standard*, for which he wrote special weekly letters over the signature of Watchman or of Amodeus. Some of these, he says, "caused a sensation at the time," and one can see why, for with his inside

knowledge he "could hit the white when I desired or it was necessary." But like Phillips he could see that the anti-slave program was now to be a slow process of education and social transformation rather than a flaming crusade.

In search for a cause appropriate to his radical orientation, he developed some theories on the Indian scandals and outrages for the *Nation* and other journals, but the national apathy after the war made it difficult to develop a reform program. The cause to which he finally did dedicate himself was that of the worker. Hinton is not alone in this transference of sympathy from the chattel slave to the wage slave; in fact, two of the John Brown journalists mentioned earlier, John Swinton and James Redpath, followed Hinton in this redirection of their revolutionary ardor. But Hinton was the first to do so, and in many ways I think his whole-hearted dedication was as much an influence on Phillips as the latter's theoretical radicalism was on him.

In addition to his other reportorial duties, he now became the Washington correspondent for the Boston *Weekly Voice*, a labor paper of which I have been able to find only scattered copies. In one of these he urged Wendell Phillips to run for Congress, and in other ways encouraged Phillips to take the role of leadership. He also announced a trip to England to investigate the co-operative schemes then widely talked about. He had maneuvered a government appointment for himself as Commissioner of Emigration in Europe (a non-salaried position, but expense paid) and went to England in August 1867. While there, he reported the Co-operative Convention for Greeley's *Tribune*, met many English radicals, interviewed John Bright, won the friendship of George Holyoke, investigated Marxism and probably met Marx, and became a member and Washington representative of the International.

I admit that when I discovered this last bit of information I was taken aback. I can picture him interviewing Marx, who after all had been a correspondent for Greeley's *Tribune*, but that he should join the International and thus become in a certain sense the first Marxist in America was something of a shock. But investigation corroborated the report. In the entry

he wrote for Bliss's *Encyclopedia of Social Reform* he says of himself: "From 1867 he was representative for the United States in the International Working Men's Association." Less direct is his statement in the *Who's Who in America* for 1900, in which he says only: "last 15 years an active Socialist; contributor to the *Social Democrat*." When questioned as to his beliefs by a Senate Committee on . . . Relations between Labor and Capital in 1883, he implies that he has been vilified for them: "I think we have got to face this question of whether or not a grinding poverty is the law of civilization. At present we do everything we can not to face it. No man states it but he is denounced as a communist; no man thinks of it and utters his thought aloud but he is pronounced a crank." And of his own convictions he told the committee: "I do not believe in what is termed 'communism,' and I am not a 'socialist' in the European sense of that term. I believe, however, that there are common properties and common forces which should be under the supervision of the community, and are not property in the sense that my coat, my watch, my purse, and my individual energies are property."

If this last remark about his "individual energies" seems unusual, it is because his energy and capacity for work seem so much beyond the average. Back in Washington in the spring of 1868, he wrote an article on John Bright for *Galaxy* in which his enthusiasm for the co-operative scheme is obvious but controlled carefully to suit his upper middle brow readers. For subscribers of the *Workingmen's Advocate* there was less need for restraint, so he could shout with his pen: "Workingmen of America, this is but a simple statement of facts, but oh! what a conviction it must carry with it. The most powerful argument . . . is not as convincing as the practical effectiveness of co-operation as an alleviator of the miseries and privations that beset the toiler at every turn." He also renewed his friendship with Whitman and did him a service by writing a glowing tribute for the Rochester *Evening Express* in which he summarized Whitman's recent successes in Europe and quoted in full the famous Emerson letter beginning, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career."

In the fall of 1868 he was back in Europe again, this time as Inspector of United States Consulates in Europe. This appointment permitted him to get as far as the Suez Canal, then nearing its completion, and the implications of which he clearly understood. Upon his return to Washington he wrote his government report, "Decline of American Tonnage," but also wrote a much more significant popularization of this information for *Galaxy*, "The Race for Commercial Supremacy in Asia." This article, with its map of the trade routes, telegraph lines, marine cables, and railroads joining the West to the East, and the excited conversation with Whitman that must have preceded it, is the forgotten source of one side of that famous poem of Whitman's middle years, "Passage to India."

But Hinton, now at the feverish height of his career, was soon off on another tack. In August of 1869 and of 1870 he had reported the National Labor Congress at Philadelphia and Cincinnati respectively, and in Europe he had visited labor meetings and conventions in various countries. Almost without realizing it, he had become an authority on the labor cause. Since his partisanship and revolutionary philosophy were unsuspected, he was asked to write a series of articles for *Atlantic Monthly* with "The Organization of Labor" as the general topic. I have found the first one, in May 1871, but no more. Perhaps Hinton's poorly suppressed enthusiasm for the Marxist position was disturbing to subscribers and, at this time in his life, to William Dean Howells, who had probably commissioned the series. Even without the subsequent article spoken of, this one is a clear statement of the radical labor position, and it is odd that social historians have not been curious about the inside information available to Hinton. Although he was at this time secretary for Section 26, the Washington chapter of the International, he seems to have felt no conflict of interest then or at any time in his career. His government report, "Labor Questions," listed for 1871-72, I have not found, and I cannot say whether he suggested any specific reforms this early in his labor career.

He continued for the rest of his life in this triple role of

journalist, government agent on many and various assignments, and active worker in socialist causes. As journalist, for instance, in 1871 he went to Cuba to live with the revolutionary army of General Maceo and to report sympathetically the life and dreams of its members. In December 1872, he wrote an important but unnoticed article, "Walt Whitman in Europe," for the *Kansas Magazine* and got its editors, his friends, to publish some of Whitman's poems. He attacked Senator Sumner for his foreign policy absurdities in "Republicanism vs. Grantism" through the *St. Louis Daily Globe*; edited the *San Francisco Evening Chronicle* in the middle 1870's; wrote *English Radical Leaders* in 1875 and *Handbook to Arizona* in 1878; collaborated with Frank Burr on a *Life of General Sheridan* in 1884; wrote his best known book, *John Brown and His Men*, in 1894; and edited the *Poems of Richard Realf*, with a biographical memoir, in 1898.

As government agent, he was special representative of President Grant at the World's Fair at Vienna in 1873, and wrote two reports on his findings. In 1882 and 1883 he was special agent of the treasury and state departments on the Mexican frontier, then a trouble spot because of cattle rustling and smuggling. His two reports, "Reciprocity in Mexico" and "Agriculture in Mexico," are models of restraint and common sense. For six years, from 1887 to 1893, he was special agent for the Department of Agriculture in charge of an elaborate investigation of irrigation needs throughout the west. The consequence of this extensive project was a series of reports that have long been considered minor classics in their field. I suppose it has never occurred to the researcher in civil or mining engineering that the distinguished author of the *Letter . . . on Artesian Wells* or the *Report on Irrigation* was a charter member of the Socialist Labor Party or that "when he accepted the President's appointment to a government post, the Party, in accordance with its principles, expelled him."

Hinton's role as socialist is difficult to follow because there are so few open comments by contemporaries like that above. Certainly, whether in or out of the numerous parties that

attained brief dominance in the radical movement of the last century, he remained always sharply opposed to capitalistic industrialism as it was found in the gilded age. In 1883, at the congressional investigation on the Relations between Labor and Capital, he held forth for two days answering any and all questions and ultimately earning the grudging respect of the committee. In 1885 he wrote for the *North American Review* an informative article, "American Labor Organizations," and again in 1889 tried to explain for readers of *Forum* the manifestations of social unrest in "Organizations of the Discontented," a remarkable presentation of the internal differences and rivalries among radical groups.

Edward and Eleanor Marx Aveling visited this country in 1886 and wrote a somewhat troubled report of their findings in *The Working Class Movement in America*. One of their happier meetings was their extended visit with the Hintons, and one of the brighter parts of the book is their fulsome tribute to him. They conclude:

No man or woman in America is more clear than he is to the bearing of all the various struggles here and there, now and then, upon the one great struggle between the working class and the possessing. And whatever form that struggle assumes during the many years that we hope, for man's sake, Hinton may live, it is certain that he will be in the thick of it, and that his energy, enthusiasm, and bravery will be of incalculable value.

Whether this enthusiasm would have been lessened had they known of Hinton's active support of Henry George in the 1887 campaign, I do not know. He was, with his old friends James Redpath and John Swinton, in initial agreement with the Single Tax campaign, but he later withdrew his support when he came to believe that George was rejecting the socialist planks in the platform with his single emphasis on the Single Tax. In 1895 he headed the Committee on Colonization in the Social Democracy of America. The plan, not as absurd at that time as it seems now, was to select a small western state, perhaps Wyoming, to be colonized by some 50,000

socialist residents who would in turn elect Eugene V. Debs to the U. S. Senate.

Internal dissension, which seems to have been far more disrupting and debilitating to 19th-century socialism than any capitalist attack could have been, destroyed this, as it did so many other socialist plans and hopes of his, but it did not weaken his radical faith. One of his last public utterances was a speech given at the Kansas State Historical Society in 1900, "The Nationalization of Freedom and the Historical Place of Kansas Therein," in which he claimed the Kansas struggles of his early years were as important to America as the French Revolution was to Europe. In his last speech, "The Pens that Made Kansas Free," he admits the revolutionary motives of many of the journalists of that period and says their trouble was not that they were radical but that they stopped being radical. Certainly this charge could not be applied to himself.

The next year he went to England to track down some John Brown papers he had heard were available. He arrived in good health but had a stroke and died quite suddenly on December 20, 1901. Little attention was given to his death either here or in England. He had outlived such contemporaries as Redpath, Whitman, and Swinton, who might have given public tribute, although Sanborn in the *Springfield Republican* and Connelley in *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* were eloquent if minor exceptions. Elsewhere in this country the fact that he was born in England and died in England made even an obituary unnecessary, and in England his devotion and service to American radicalism were hardly known. Since then he has disappeared from the historical record so completely that today quite literally not one in a million know his name.

Indeed, that an American figure should be so intimately involved in key parts of our national life and should be so completely overlooked in our standard histories is but another of the many mysteries of Hinton's strange career. Perhaps he is a victim of the cause he served, for the good reporter relates the activities of others—not his own—and the

effective agitator of necessity subordinates himself in promoting others as leaders. Even his writing of the Lincoln biography—the centennial of which gives the re-discovery of Hinton a certain topical interest—was so insignificant to him that I found it out by accident. One hundred years ago there were few Americans as radical as the English born Chartist whose strange career has been so forgotten. Hinton did not have much of a sense of humor, and I do not suppose the irony of his reputation would amuse him; but in the odd complexity that distinguishes our culture, he will probably be longest remembered for writing the biography of a president he did not want nominated.

SHADOWS HAVE DARKLY FALLEN:  
THE POETIC AFTERMATH  
OF THE  
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

*Lee Steinmetz*

I

AMONG UNSUNG BATTLES of the Civil War, none is more remarkable than that waged by Northern and Southern poets during the years of conflict. This poetic battle was a colorful one: sentimental, melodramatic, vituperative. The dead were elegized in mournful numbers as casualty lists lengthened; guns thundered in iambic pentameter as Northern poets bemoaned the evils of slavery and Southern poets sought to preserve an established way of life. Examples aplenty will be found, I am sure, in my recent *The Poetry of the American Civil War*.

With the end of the war, however, poets now faced the task of binding up the poetic wounds of battle. And although Whitman declared in *Drum-Taps* that affection should solve the problems of freedom, poets North and South discovered that affection was hard bought and that freedom was not as easily put in practice as the poets writing in the early days of the war had presumed. Paradoxically, sectional poets found themselves farther apart immediately after Appomattox than before, for aside from divergence over slavery, Northern and Southern war verse had shown more similarities than differences. The Great Leveller had exacted identical responses in the manifold elegies of the war years; call-to-arms poems had needed geographical allusions to identify clearly the allegiance of their authors; and identical phraseology had invoked the Deity to aid both the abolition and the preservation of slavery. But the war once over, poets—who considered themselves

representative of society at large—reflected some of the fissures in society opened up by the war. Despite Whitman's declaration that after the war nothing should cohere like the several states, poets felt themselves forced instead to point out the obstacles in the way of cohesion.

At war's end, poets whose vision was retrospective found themselves gazing back over four years of carnage. And the voices which rose over the carnage were not always prophetic of peace to come. Carrying on a tradition established during the war, poets continued to hymn elegies over the fallen. In these elegies, Northern and Southern poets began to exhibit differences where previously had existed only similarities. In the North, following the conflict, the ceremonies connected with the raising of monuments to the war dead prompted a quantity of elegiac verse. Horace H. Currier's "Poem," written for delivery at the dedication of the Memorial Hall in Dedham, Massachusetts, on September 29, 1868, is typical of many:

When Treason's bloody portents glared  
Along the Southern sky;  
And, like a summons-blast, the roar  
Of Sumter's guns swept by,—

How mighty the Nation roused!  
As when the slumbering sea,  
A black storm smites with rage, and stirs  
The deep immensity.

The bugle's strain, the roll of drums,  
Alarm, were in the air;  
And armed men were thick, and flags  
Were streaming everywhere.

It was the arm of Freedom raised  
With martial energy,—  
It was our Country roused to save  
Her grand integrity.

And, mingling with that warrior host,  
In panoplied array,  
There stood our own brave sons, whose fame  
We celebrate to-day.

## POETIC AFTERMATH OF THE CIVIL WAR

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Forth from their peaceful homes they went,  
By loyal zeal led on;  
The worthy sons of Dedham's sires  
Who marched to Lexington.

They bore our symbol-banner on,  
The Union's standard sheet;  
Or high, or low, yet honored still,  
In triumph or defeat.

They tracked Potomac's battle-shores,  
South Mountain's fiery side;  
And o'er Antietam's crimson field  
Rolled back the gory tide. . . .

Keep bright upon these tablet-walls  
The Martyr-roll of Fame;  
And it shall fill this stately pile  
With Freedom's holy flame.

Here Age shall come, with constant faith,  
In reverent homage bow;  
Here Youth shall learn a patriot's worth,  
And take a patriot's vow.

Ay, make this place a hallowed shrine,  
The patriot's Ark of Light,  
Our Faith and Deed to consecrate  
To Country, God, and Right!

In Currier's poem, a calm feeling of gratitude at the fact of victory has replaced the personal grief characteristic of earlier elegies. The individual, either historic or fictional, who a few years before had formed the subject of elegy upon elegy, has here given way to the relative impersonality of "our own brave sons."

By way of contrast, Mrs. Cornelia J. M. Jordan's *Richmond: Her Glory and Her Graves* (Richmond, 1867) suggests the way Southerners, following the war, reacted to the carnage:

### X.

In power and splendor thus complete,  
Wealth pouring treasures at her feet,—  
Who might foretell her fate?

As on her rose-crowned hills of green,  
Like Thebes a wonder and like Rome a Queen,  
This stateliest City sate.

XI.

But suddenly above her rolled  
Fierce thunders dark, and shadows cold  
Enwrapped her like a shroud,  
Then lifting high her queenly head,  
Her flag unfurled, her banner spread,  
We hear her war-cry loud.

XII.

Full armed she riseth in her might,  
Her buckler *Truth*, her shield the *Right*.  
Who dare her prowess try?  
Behold! the Northman's frown intense  
Rests on her proud embattlements—  
Who may *his* strength deny?

XIII.

Four years—four weary, woeful years  
Of blood and carnage, grief and tears,  
Unheard of erst before,—  
As bristling cannon scowl around,  
While battle thunders jar the ground,  
And clattering muskets roar.

XIV.

We see her struggling in her pride,  
Her slow-declining strength defied,  
Her brave sons, one by one,  
In open field, by forest rill,  
On Drury's Bluff and Malvern Hill,  
Falling their swords upon.

XV.

Strewn o'er Manassas' crimson field,  
Where hearts dripped gore, but would not yield,  
And gallant blades were riven—  
Behold them in their beauty lie!  
The brave, scarred form, the stricken eye,  
The dead to Glory given! . . .

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### XVII.

And swiftly now from other fields,  
With broken swords and shattered shields  
They're gathered—here at last,  
To find, upon their mother's breast  
A peaceful, calm, unbroken rest—  
Life's stormy conflict past.

### XVIII.

From Bethel's darkened plains afar,  
From Cedar Mountain's gory scar—  
From Shenandoah's wrecked vale,  
They're borne upon their blood-stained bier  
To find a smooth grave-pillow here—  
All told,—Life's sorrowing tale!

### XIX.

And from the sweet sequestered bowers  
Of Hollywood, Spring's early flowers  
Look forth with smiling eye,  
As to the low, sad, wailing tones  
Of Richmond for her martyred sons,  
They breathe a mute reply.

### XX.

They tell of seed in sorrow sown,  
By God's own breath mysterious blown,  
That we shall reap in joy—  
When we have laid Earth's crosses down,  
And the tuned Harp and fadeless Crown,  
No rude hands may destroy.

Completing Part I of the poem and continuing into Part II, Mrs. Jordan describes the fall of Richmond. Then, after listing more than thirty martyred heroes of the Old Dominion, Mrs. Jordan closes her poem:

### XXV.

Ended now is all the struggle—  
Lost the *cause* they died to save;  
Folded is the war-worn banner,  
Crimsoned with the blood they gave.

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*But not lost, and not forgotten,*  
Shall they be—the true and tried,  
Who upheld it long and nobly,  
Through the battle's angry tide.

### XXVI.

Passed are they to shores supernal,  
Far beyond the rolling flood;  
Sealed each martyr's brow immortal,  
With the sacrament of blood—  
Grounded arms for crowns of glory;  
Swords exchanged for Heavenly palms;  
On their death wounds Christ the Healer  
Pours the sweet Celestial Balms. . . .

### XXX.

Thy past—the crown that decked thy brow  
Is but a faded glory now,  
Its light no more we see,  
Lost, lost thy sceptre in an hour—  
A blighted oak, a fallen tower  
Are emblems all of thee.

### XXXI.

Thy forehead wears the mourner's wreath  
Of cypress, and thy burning breath  
Floats out in fevered sighs;  
Thy goodly mansions, once so fair,  
Show vacant places here and there,  
And tears bedim thine eyes.

### XXXII.

Niobe of cities! grief hath drunk  
Thy spirit up, and sorrow sunk  
Its arrows in thy heart;  
To see thy bravest champions fall,  
To hear thy sufferers vainly call,  
Hath been thy destined part.

### XXXIII.

Yet girt with Truth's immortal will,  
Great in thy desolation still,  
Fair in thy swift decay—  
Like Rome amid her ruins grand,  
Like Thebes a marvel through the land,  
Thou sitt'st a Queen to-day.

XXXIV.

And unborn nations yet will own  
Thy sceptred rule, when years have flown  
And by thee, side by side,  
The great and good will stand to claim  
The honor due thy glorious name—  
Virginia's boast and pride!

XXXV.

War's blighting breath may still consume  
Our temples fair—our roses' bloom  
His ruthless hand may smite—  
But wrong shall not always assail—  
Immortal Truth must still prevail;  
*God will defend the Right!*

While Mrs. Jordan and Currier equally reverence their war dead, Mrs. Jordan's poem reflects a point of view quite the opposite of Currier's. Dedham, Massachusetts, presumably, had changed little since Fort Sumter, and the tone of Currier's poem carries the conviction that the region's way of life will continue unbroken, whereas Mrs. Jordan suggests that the death of Richmond, in the wake of war's devastation, epitomizes the passing of a distinct, and gracious, way of life. Thus Mrs. Jordan tolls the bell not only for Virginia's fallen heroes, but for the Old Dominion itself. Richmond's "glory," as much as her "graves," forms the subject of the Southern elegy.

II

At this point the backward vision of post-bellum poets merges with the present. In elegizing the death of a civilization, Southern poets, after all, saw immediately before them the desolation which prompted their dirges. Northern poets, looking about them, beheld no such desolation, and were consequently free to rejoice at the end of war. The voice of C. W. Lownsbury, in his "Poem" (from *Leoline, and Other Poems*, Detroit, 1866), is the voice of the conqueror taking satisfaction in the immediate fact of victory.

The clouds of war, which overcast  
So long, our bleeding nation,  
Have rolled away, and breaks at last,  
The sun of our salvation.

And hearts bowed down so long with woe,  
Torn hearts, so long time yearning  
For absent ones, now overflow  
With joy, that Peace's returning.

And even now, beneath her rays,  
New joy, new life is starting,  
The wail of joy is lost in praise,  
Such hope it is imparting.

The hills, the valleys, well may shout  
Their jubilant refrain,  
And stars, as nightly they come out,  
Repeat it to the main.

Until all lands shall catch the voice,  
And kindle with the fame  
Of deeds in which they may rejoice,  
Till they shall do the same.

Until one sunburst fills the skies,  
And all the raptured earth  
Shall know, when wounded Error dies,  
Then Freedom starts to birth.

The tone of relief at the end of bloodshed predominates in Lownsbury's poem. But the poet appears to be taking the long look when he equates absence of the "clouds of war" with "the sun of our salvation." Northern poets found difficulty in rejoicing over war's end without at the same time suggesting that with Appomattox the long-awaited Scriptural millennium had arrived. With Anti-Christ—that is to say, Slavery—bound, the nation could enjoy, if not a thousand years of peace, at least peace for as far into the future as anybody cared to look. Perhaps the cue came from Lincoln; in any event, the word "Union" became, for Northern poets, a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. Southern poets, however, entertained reservations, to say the least, and with them the temerity to suggest that Union had not been irrevocably achieved at Appomattox.

There was, for one thing, the question of Jefferson Davis, who had not gone unnoticed in poetry during the war. As early as 1863, the Northern poet E. Norman Gunnison, in "The Devil and Jeff. Davis" (from *Our Stars. For the Army of the Potomac*, Philadelphia, 1863), had returned a fearsome indictment against Davis, whom he pictured visiting with the Devil and recounting what he has done to advance the Devil's interests ("I have sold my country, divided the land. . . . I have caused a river of blood to flow. . . . I have peopled the land with disunion and strife. . . . I have caused a world of widows' tears.") With President Davis's incarceration at Fort Monroe from May, 1865 to May, 1867, Gunnison's poetic if doggerel indictment became prosaic fact. Although the case against Davis was dropped before the close of the decade, Davis's imprisonment constituted, from a Southern point of view, one of several indications that the Union being loudly proclaimed by Northern poets was really a matter of which side are you on. In 1865, Mrs. Cornelia J. M. Jordan, the tireless Virginia lyrst of the Lost Cause, composed "An Appeal for Jefferson Davis," which she published in her *Richmond* volume. It is doubtful whether Mrs. Jordan's "appeal" greatly influenced Johnson's lack of interest in prosecuting Davis, but the poem is important in reflecting a characteristic Southern point of view toward the aftermath of war.

#### AN APPEAL FOR JEFFERSON DAVIS.

To HIS EXCELLENCY ANDREW JOHNSON,

President of the United States.

Unheralded, unknown, I come to thee,  
 Who holdest in thy hands the scales of power;  
 Assured thou will not spurn the suppliant,  
 Who with frail, helpless hands and burning heart,  
 Lays at thine honored feet *her* simple plea  
 Of "Mercy for the Captive."

Thou hast known  
 The tempest-tossings of a chequered life,  
 The chill of adverse winds, the wintry blight

Of hopes too fondly cherished. Thou hast seen  
How frail a bubble is the world's applause,  
How empty its poor praise. Oh! pity us  
On whose life-paths shadows have darkly fallen,  
Whose bruised hearts thy clemency may heal.

• • • •

Oh, honored Chief,  
Be kind, be *just* to him whom JACKSON loved,  
And proudly honored with his high esteem:  
Upon his head blessings unspoken rest—ties  
Stronger than hooks of steel circle him round;  
Prayers from unnumbered hearts go up for him.  
Art thou *a husband*?—for *his* safety now,  
A wife sits weeping through the lonely hours  
Of his long absence. Silent, bitter tears  
Well from her burdened heart, while boding fears  
Sadden with anxious thoughts her sleepless pillow.  
Art thou *a father*?—In their stranger home  
Young children watch for *him*, and pause to hear  
The step that comes not—aye, they often ask,  
“*Where is our father?*—*why* does he not come?”  
And grave lips blanch and quiver in reply,  
And talk of “*prayer*” and an “*abiding trust*”  
In the All-Father, God. Oh, round his neck  
Fond arms would gladly circle; prattling lips  
Would pour into his ear their music-tones  
Of simple, guileless love. Say, would’st thou give  
Joy to these *blameless ones*? then open wide  
His dreary prison door.

• • • •

Oh, most honored Chief,  
Head of a mighty nation!—lend thine ear  
To this poor, earnest plea for one beloved.  
*Set the brave captive free!* and when at last  
Thy soul stands trembling at that judgment-seat  
Where prayers avail not, when the written scroll  
Of human deeds is opened, and there lies  
The record of *thy life*,—should aught appear  
Which justice would consign to punishment,  
May the recording angel *blot it out*,  
And o’er thy name, in testimony, write,  
“*Blessed are the merciful.*”

OCTOBER 22, 1865.

## III

Mrs. Jordan's poem is interesting in another respect, showing as it does how poets a century ago used poetry to comment on the manners, mores, and mischiefs of their time in a way today reserved for the syndicated columnist, if not for the "Letters to the Editor" section of periodicals. A contingent of poets, however, when moved to political and social commentary, chose satire in preference to Mrs. Jordan's brand of sentimentalism. Although a small core of satirists had been at work throughout the war, satirizing war-profiteering, shoddyism, Copperheads, and—above all—slavery, these satirists constituted a distinctly minority voice during the mid-19th century. John Burke, a satirist whose "Chivalry and Slavery" (from *Chivalry, Slavery, and Young America*, New York, 1866) constitutes one of the 19th century's fiercest diatribes against slavery, observed in the preface to his work that America seemed less given to writing satire, and took less kindly to it, than most other civilizations. Burke may have been too close to his time to understand the several forces working against satire: the prevailing optimism; the theory of human perfectibility; the penchant for progress, experiment, and change; and the reliance on the promptings of the heart and the emotions.

Nevertheless, the satirists demanded a hearing. Whereas most of their sentimental peers were content to rejoice—or lament—at the end of conflict, at least two satirists—one a Southerner, one a Northerner—sniffed the post-war breeze and caught the taint of Reconstruction. More encompassing in their vision than Mrs. Jordan, these poets realized that a specific act such as the incarceration of Jefferson Davis constituted simply one manifestation of a basic Northern attitude toward the South.

These poets had been anticipated, at least indirectly, by earlier Northern poets who, immediately before and at the beginning of the war, had held out against the excesses of Northern anti-slavery agitation. In two anonymous poems—*The New Pantheon or the Age of Black* (Rollo, N. Y., 1860),

and *The Ballad of the Abolition Blunder-buss* (Boston, 1861)—the anti-slavery forces of the North were mercilessly castigated. Although it is doubtful whether these poets, writing at the beginning of the Eighteen-Sixties, could foresee the excesses which would be visited on the South by the Radicals in Congress, one Southern poet, in 1868, was able to see clearly enough. One of the more interesting poems to grow out of the Civil War is J. U. Marshall's *The Times: or, Chaos Has Come Again* (Charleston, 1868), which excoriates the North both for the actual conduct of the war and for its handling of Reconstruction. Marshall's poem constitutes, from the Southern point of view, a rogue's gallery, containing as it does unflattering portraits of numerous Northern generals and statesmen whose conduct the South condemned as inhuman. Marshall viewed with dismay the numbers and power of this, to him, coercive group, their habit of overriding President Johnson's attempts to bring about an amicable and peaceful reunion of North and South, their passage of various Reconstruction acts which delayed for several years the re-entry of the Confederate states into the Union, and their imposition of an occupational military and bureaucratic rule on the South.

Although Marshall's subject matter would today find voice in the editorial column of a newspaper, his literary, historical, and Biblical allusions produce occasionally effective literary overtones. The poet labels the Northern capital a "City of the Plain"; those who attempt to speak truth about Reconstruction are "much like Daniel in 'The Lion's Den'"; and the South is "the land of Uz," the Southern people counterparts of Job, except that they are beset by afflictions vastly more numerous than those which plagued their Biblical forerunner. Marshall's allusions to the holier-than-thou attitude of the Northern descendants of the Puritans, in stanzas 65 and 66, are particularly incisive. By his use of Biblical allusions, Marshall continues the tradition fostered throughout the war by Southerners and Northerners alike: that somehow or other the war transcended in significance the temporal and mundane. But Marshall's Biblical allusions

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are means, not ends. Marshall's targets, quite patently, are his contemporaries. The traditional satiric technique of disguising, however thinly, the objects of ridicule may be more artistic, but a sense of outrage apparently dictated to Marshall the most direct route as the most satisfying. And so, one by one, Marshall directly pays his disrespects to specific individuals and organizations.

Militarily, few if any Northern generals so courted, or attained, the hatred of the South as did Benjamin Franklin Butler, whose oppressive measures against the Southern people during the occupation of New Orleans in 1862 earned him the epithet of "Beast." In the following excerpt from the beginning of his poem, Marshall alludes to the freedom with which Butler and his army of occupation appropriated Southern property; to Butler's failure in December of 1864 to take Fort Fisher, a North Carolinian garrison guarding Wilmington Harbor; and to the execution on June 7, 1862, of a Southern citizen, William B. Mumford, for his part in tearing down a Union flag. As military governor of Louisiana, Butler was officially responsible for this punishment, which to Southerners symbolized Butler's entire occupation!

### 1

Awake my Muse! of spoons first sing—  
Not horn, or pewter spoons, or wood,  
But such as have a silvery ring;  
Mankind may think that I allude  
To him, the *gentle Beast*, the good and brave,  
Whom many call a liar, thief and knave!

### 2

A famous man, and fearless too,  
And quite a lion in the fight;  
That he tooks spoons, is very true,  
But not *Fort Fisher*, if I'm right!  
There Grant—perhaps he'd ta'en an extra cup—  
Pronounced his gallant *confrere* "bottled up!"

### 3

A stinging say, and *very* rude—  
It roused, no doubt, his hottest ire;

His veins swelled up, a lava flood,  
His great heart throbbed with Aetna-fire—  
He stood a monument of rage, and nursed  
His inward wrath, while some aver he cursed!

4

Oh Butler! man of mighty deeds,  
Renowned Jack Ketch, of hangmen chief,—  
Hear Mumford's widow, in her weeds,  
Appeal to heaven in maddened grief!  
If thou *in part* art human, not all *beast*,  
Then prove it, by one decency at least;

5

Do justice on thyself! appease  
The ghost, which hovers ever nigh,  
Repent at once, on trembling knees,  
And by a halter dare to die;  
A cord, a beam, a garret, and a knot,  
A sudden leap, and there in darkness rot!

6

Thine epitaph shall be from all,  
A howl, a hiss through clenched teeth—  
Hootings thy dirge—thy funeral pall  
A people's blackest hate; a wreath  
Of blessings on the place shall ever rest,  
Thyself detested, but thy gallows blessed!

Marshall excoriates not only military leaders such as Butler, but also various members of Congress responsible for the iron-fisted Northern attitude toward the South. It is significant that Marshall should have singled out as targets for particular opprobrium Thaddeus Stevens and Benjamin Franklin Wade. Stevens, Republican member of Congress, was, after all, a leading Radical, and Wade, United States senator from Ohio, was co-author of the Wade-Davis bill of 1864, which provided for the unqualified emancipation of all slaves residing in the Southern states. A number of the organizations and groups spawned by the Northern occupation also came within the range of Marshall's satiric artillery. Bitterly obnoxious to the poet are the scalawags:

43

Base servitors, with cap in hand,  
They bow, obsequious, to the dust,  
Before intruders in the land,  
Who love them not, and scarcely trust;  
The hounds, who'd bear the lash without a whine,  
Or meekly serve their masters while they dine!

44

Enough! for why should thoughts intrude,  
Of those who tear their mother's breast  
For vile rewards of scraps of good?

• • • •

No more! consign them to their loathsome lot,  
Their boon—a prayer that they may be forgot!

More unflattering, if possible, is Marshall's picture of the carpetbaggers:

60

Prepared to pray, or overreach,  
Arch spoilers from another clime,  
Their trade alike, to thieve or preach,  
Armed with an impudence sublime;  
This fated land they wander to and fro,  
To blight and blast with discord as they go.

61

Like pilgrims, in an evil hour,  
Or Israel to the promised land,  
Or Egypt's locusts to devour,  
They sought the South in many a band;  
A curse, a plague, a pest to desolate,  
Whom spoils appease not, plunder cannot sate!

62

Oh they are legion! in our street  
Their glibness we have heard disclose  
Of liberty the varied sweets.  
Their wealth, indeed, one hardly knows—  
A box of collars, spangled with fly dirt,  
A carpet bag, two dickies, and a shirt!

63

Vociferous, and strong in prayer,  
And nasal, when they chant a psalm,  
'Tis their's salvation to declare  
To whom they will, and likewise damn.  
Elect themselves, and saved beyond a doubt,  
'Tis their's to let men in or keep them out!

64

Announced by their angelic mien,  
Proclaimers of good will to men,  
Who charges them with hands unclean?  
Such thought would be "*Magnatum Scan.*"  
Are they not mild as doves, as serpents wise,  
And, though earth-born, vicegerents of the skies?

65

Are they not worthy of their hire?  
May they not take what is their due?  
Their tongues, tipped with celestial fire,  
Assert a claim not now quite new,  
A sort of "right divine," by special grace,  
That they, anointed, are His chosen race.

66

This is to them a Canaan fair,  
Where milk and honey stream-like flow;  
Shall they not hold it everywhere,  
Despite the Canaanitish foe,  
Whom they have smitten, by the Lord's command,  
And, as per covenant, possess the land?

67

Are we not smitten, hip and thigh?  
And dare we still to walk erect?  
Or dare we for our dead to sigh,  
Who perish'd, battling the elect?  
Or dare we speak above a whisper'd breath,  
Of things that were, and of our "living death?"

Less fully treated, but no more kindly handled, are the Union League and the Freedman's Bureau.

## IV

In the main, Northern poets, by their silence, expressed satisfaction with the North's handling of Reconstruction. Among the epidemic of elegies on the death of Lincoln, for example, no poem hinted that Reconstruction might have been a part of Lincoln's earthly task. Lincoln had been sent to earth for one appointed purpose: to free the slaves. Thaddeus Stevens, Ben Wade, and company were perfectly adequate to the demands of Reconstruction.

But a Northern satirist provided the exception. J. U. Marshall's diatribe might appear to owe more than it does to sectional bitterness were not the jeremiad of this South Carolinian against the Radicals paralleled by the work of an anonymous Northern Elijah, whose *The Mongrelites: or, The Radicals—So-called. A Satiric Poem* appeared in New York in 1866. The first paragraph of the poet's preface, in which he divorces himself from "Yankeedom" and from New England—apparently synonymous terms in his thinking—might, taken alone, suggest that a Southerner wrote the poem. In the poem itself, however, the author makes clear his Northern origin by professing:

I'd rather take a rebel by the hand,  
Hear treason spoken boldly in the land,  
Feel war's infernal shock convulse the ground,  
See blood like water pouring from a wound,  
Than hear a fanatic his views proclaim,  
And prostitute the truth to selfish aim!

Some of the most oppressive as well as some of the more infamous acts of the Radicals had not been perpetrated when *The Mongrelites* appeared, but the Radicals had made their intentions clear enough to enable the poet to deliver one of the most bitter, as well as one of the most artistic, satires of the period.

The poet's satire, interestingly, begins in his preface. For once in the prefaces of the period, a poet makes a customarily sickening form of self-abasement work for him satirically. The self-deprecation begins conventionally enough: "Nor do

I claim that the satire is distinguished by any remarkable evidence of poetic ability." The reason?—inferior material with which to work. "It is true at the same time that the subject was a lamentably poor one, and enough to cause the muse to sing her very poorest song. I have, therefore, the consolation of knowing that, however poor the rhymes may be, they adorn the subject, and give it a degree of respectability which it could never have possessed outside of the connexion." The poet's subject, simply if not so purely, is the Radical group in Congress, approximately forty of whom the poet takes up in turn, calls by name, characterizes unlovingly, and thoroughly stigmatizes. And all this despite the fact that the poet, in the closing paragraph of his preface, states that he has "endeavored to avoid personal allusions in the poem. . . ."

Of the forty-odd personalities the poet found unavoidable, none is more entertainingly drawn, or more typical of the poet's satirical approach, than that of Charles Sumner, United States senator from Massachusetts. Sumner, a rabid anti-slavery advocate prior to the war, became one of the leading Radicals in promoting Reconstruction legislation, and is perhaps best remembered today for the consequences of his impassioned "The Crime Against Kansas" speech, delivered on the floor of the Senate May 19-20, 1856, in which he used abusive language in speaking of Andrew Pickens Butler, an absent South Carolina congressman. The retributive and severe beating with a cane which Sumner suffered at the hands of Preston S. Brooks, another South Carolina congressman and relative of Butler, conferred on Sumner a species of martyrdom in the eyes of Northern abolitionists. The poet's remark that "No Brooks stands o'er him with uplifted cane" refers, of course, to the caning incident:

All hail to Massachusetts! hail, all hail!  
Mother of "isms" never known to fail;  
Hail to her sons, whose fame spreads far and wide,  
For skinning fleas to sell their fat and hide!  
Monarch of letters! of the world the cheat!  
"Hub of the Universe," thee I greet!

Hail to thy daughters, as they shrilly preach  
Of woman's rights, or free-love "isms" teach;  
Hail to thee all, when, with extended hand,  
You greet the placid Sumner on the stand. . . .

• • • •

Most valiant Sumner! bravely has he done  
His too, too dirty work at Washington:  
With little learning, none but borrowed wit,  
With heart for magnanimity unfit;  
With thoughts that burn from all consuming hate;  
With mind that nothing e'er can elevate,  
Fanatic doctrines to his crew proclaims,  
And Southern honor ignobly defames.  
Prates much of Freedom, and of Liberty,  
And yet a would-be tyrant o'er the free;  
Prates magnanimity, yet is not slow  
To strike a shackled and defenceless foe;  
Would face a man with smiles; when, turned to part,  
Assassin-like, would stab him to the heart!  
"Down to the dust," he valorously cries,  
"No peace till Southern freedom helpless lies;  
Right, Law, Constitution, all are naught,  
Till Southern pride to dust, to dust is brought."  
Oh, gallant Sumner! fearlessly he stands,  
Hurling his thunder, giving his commands;  
And well may he securely fear disdain,  
No Brooks stands o'er him with uplifted cane;  
No hot, indignant Southron quickly flies  
To lash the coward till he fainting lies.

After further denigration of Sumner, the poet, in an act characteristic of satirists, turns backward, contrasting noble figures of the past with what appear to him to be the intellectual and moral dwarfs who now rule the Congress. But the author of *The Mongrelites* is exceptional. In denouncing the fire-eating Radicals, this Northerner found himself a company of one. For the most part, Northern relief at victory and the end of bloodshed left little room in poetry for concern at the post-war Southern plight. Northern poets were adept at shedding metrical tears over fallen sparrows, but the South, guilty of the twin crimes of slavery and rebellion, were, from a Union point of view, merely reaping the inevitable harvest

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of the grapes of wrath. For the Sword of Righteousness, after all, was not only swift, but terrible.

Thus poets, faced with the fact of Appomattox, sought to make their poetic peace. This peace, both in and out of poetry, found realization more difficult than the flag-waving call-to-arms poems of the war years would have indicated. Writing at the beginning of the conflict, the Southern poet C. B. Northrop, in "The South Carolina Hymn of Independence" (from *Southern Odes, by the Outcast, a Gentleman of South Carolina. Published for the Benefit of the Ladies Fuel Society*, Charleston, 1861), had hysterically intoned:

South Carolinians! proudly see,  
Our State proclaimed to all the world,  
On none dependent, sovereign, free.  
Foul treason has its flag unfurled.  
Foul treason has its flag unfurled.  
From the plains, and from the mountains,  
From ocean's far resounding shore,  
Rushing to war, our people pour,  
Like a torrent from its fountains.  
Arm! Carolinians, arm!  
Our country shield from harm.  
March on! march on! our banners wave.  
The drum has beat th' alarm.

And the Northern poet W. A. Devon, in "Arouse!" (from *War Lyrics*, New York, 1864), had frenetically responded:

Arouse! brothers, 'rouse!  
For our dear native land;  
And strike for its glory  
With heart and with hand!  
While round the old banner  
We will rally in pride,  
And scatter the Traitors,  
Would dare to deride!

The differences here seem superficial, a matter of geography only. The response of Southerner and Northerner to the challenge of war is virtually identical. Contrasting this unanimity of tone with the tone of Northern and Southern

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poems written immediately following the conflict, however, suggests that Union had been achieved outwardly, not inwardly. For although the shouting and the tumult had died, the captains and the kings appeared, to Southerners, very much in evidence. There were still those whose eyes had not yet seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; who, looking about them, saw only that shadows had darkly fallen. It was to be another decade before the shadows would begin to lift, and America would begin, according to Whitman's prophecy, to "solve the problems of freedom."